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New IBTS Publications

We are pleased to announce two new publications, the first arising out of a conference on 'Baptist Histories in Eastern Europe' in 2005, and the second being the proceedings of the Third Annual Theological Symposium of the International Postgraduate Theological Fellowship in 2007 – both held at the International Baptist Theological Seminary, Prague.

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Editorial

Papers presented in this volume recognise the quality academic work of younger European Baptist scholars who have been working on their research degrees at IBTS. One of the aims of this journal is to enable them to make public their research work and stimulate their engagement in scholarly discussions. This third collection of former and current students' articles is a fine contribution to the burgeoning research into the histories of Eastern European Baptists.

In her engaging essay, Daily Adam (Estonia) reflects on the extraordinary life story and missionary witness of Emilie Johanna Bertelson in Estonia and Russia before the Second World War. Daily provides a convincing account of Bertelson's strong personality, faith commitment, leadership skills and passion for evangelism among both the Estonian and Russian speaking population that has left a lasting impact on Baptist work in Estonia.

Working with unique family archives and oral histories of Baptist contemporaries, as well as files of security police, Marko Grozdanov (Macedonia) investigates the life story of a Baptist leader. Avoiding hagiographic temptation, he offers, via his grandfather's story, an exceptional perspective into the life of Baptists in the Balkans before and during Communist rule. This work is an excellent example of biography as an approach to theology. While looking at the life of a particular Baptist under extremely difficult conditions, Grozdanov is able to extend and connect a person's story with the narrative of the larger Baptist community in Yugoslavia without sparing some of its darker moments.

Johannes Dyck (Germany) skilfully links exceptional primary sources with a broad look at the story of the German speaking Mennonite Brethren, Baptist and Lutheran communities after their deportation from Europe to the Central Asian region of the Former Soviet Union at the beginning of World War II. He enquires into the strategies of survival of German faith communities under Stalin's purges and severe persecutions before, during and after the war. He argues that a spiritual revival between Germans along Pietistic patterns of conversion and fellowship without denominational distinctions and the transformation of the fellowships into stable congregational structures held the keys to survival.

The Revd Doc Dr Parush R Parushev
Academic Dean, IBTS

'She Worked Like a Man': Life and Ministry of Emilie Bertelson in Russia and Estonia until 1940

Introduction

Emilie Johanna Bertelson (1884-1965) worked in St Petersburg and in Estonia as a missionary and evangelist and had a lasting impact on Estonian Baptist history. She is also known in the Swedish Baptist mission story. The majority of Bertelson's life was spent in Estonia where she committed her energy to evangelism in Eastern Estonia, in the area near Lake Peipsi. However, her role in the Estonian Baptist story has been given little attention, partly because historical surveys in Estonian Baptist circles tend to focus on the role of men rather than women, and partly because Estonian Baptists still lack a comprehensive historical narrative.

This essay aims to analyse the formative influences on Emilie Bertelson which helped her to develop into an outstanding spiritual worker among Estonian Baptists. Attention will also be paid to the methods of Bertelson's missionary work and the results of her evangelism efforts. As a woman working in a male dominated 'spiritual field', in a patriarchal culture, Bertelson was an exceptional figure. Both Estonian Baptist identity, and even more the local culture in Eastern Estonia, partly penetrated by 'Old Believers' and Orthodox values, was reluctant to accept a woman in a church leadership role. Though in evangelical circles in the early twentieth century women were accepted as missionaries, Bertelson's actual work included much broader tasks: she was an educator, a 'church planter', a preacher, a pastoral figure, and a Christian journalist.

This essay uses a number of primary sources, such as Bertelson's diaries, typewritten manuscripts and Mustvee Baptist Church Minutes, along with oral information and private correspondence with people who personally knew Bertelson, which have been made available to the author. In addition, Baptist periodicals *Teekäija* (Wayfarer) and *Elukevade* (The Spring of Life) published articles about Bertelson and her evangelism work. As to secondary sources, David Lagergren's writings in Swedish contain valuable information. The first part of the essay analyses Bertelson's early years and education as preparation for later ministry; the second part explores her ministry from 1918-1924 in St Petersburg (Leningrad); and the third part focuses on Bertelson's expanding evangelism and 'church planting' in Estonia from 1925-1940. With the beginning of Soviet occupation in Estonia and the Second World War, from

1940 a new era began in the life and ministry of Emilie Bertelson: she lost Swedish support and had to minister in the context of severe atheistic pressures. This phase of her life remains outside the scope of this essay.

Preparation for ministry

Emilie Bertelson, from a Swedish ethnic background, was born on 14th October 1884 in Naissaare, a little island in the Baltic Sea. The island is part of Estonia but during those days had a mainly Swedish population. Emilie's parents were influenced by a pietistic revival movement which reached the island in the 1870s, and was led by a Lutheran missionary Petrus Bergsten who worked on the island until 1881.¹ Revivalist ideas continued to spread and Emilie's mother experienced repentance and conversion, and her father remained friendly towards the pietistic form of faith though did not clearly identify himself with the movement. A number of relatives from her mother's extended family, the Matsons, were later influential in Estonian Baptist life, perhaps the most well known of them being Daniel Heinrich Matson, who was a pastor, evangelist and writer. The pietistic religious context in which Emilie Bertelson grew up emphasised Christian activity as an important element of religious life.²

Important for Emilie Bertelson's own spiritual life and calling was a trip for young people, in which she participated with her parents. On 24th June 1900 the group visited the Kehra Baptist Church where the inauguration of a new prayer house was celebrated. This experience had a deep impact on Emilie, and she decided to 'give her life to God', as was the widespread expression to denote religious conversion among Baptist circles. Conversion was so important to her that she remembered it as something very special for years. She wrote about this event in her diary 62 years later.³ For years Bertelson kept in her Bible the dried flowers she had picked in the Kehra church yard on the day of her 'new birth'.⁴ Sudden (and often dramatic) conversion, which transferred a formal faith into a personal experience, was considered a norm in Estonian Baptist churches. This model motivated and inspired Bertelson later in her work as an evangelist.

¹ Harald Viktor Dahl, 'Olemasolu lõpetanud kogudusi' [Churches ceased to exist], in Richard Kaups, (ed.), *50 aastat apostlite radadel: 1884-1834* [50 years on the paths of the Apostles: 1884-1834], (Keila: E.B.K. Liidu kirjastus, 1934), p. 92.

² Emilie Bertelson, 'Mor har gått hem till Gud' [Mother went to another home with God], in *Länken* [Link], 9 (1931), p. 72.

³ Emilie Bertelson, *Dagbok* [Diary], 20.05.1957-10.12.1962, entry 07.07.1962. The original document is owned by Mustvee Baptist Church

⁴ Hildegard Tuulik to Daily Valk, (14.05.1999). Private letter. The original document is owned by Daily Adam.

Emilie Bertelson was baptised on 1 September 1900 in Tallinn's bay by Hans Krabi, a prophetic figure from a Revivalist church (Est. *priikogudus*) background,⁵ who led the Tallinn Second Baptist Church, which can be characterised by its enthusiastic spirituality.⁶ In Naissaare, a small department of Tallinn Second Baptist Church was established, consisting of converts baptised by Krabi.⁷ An independent Baptist church in Naissaare was registered in 1906.⁸ This church had a short existence. When the tsarist government started to build fortifications on the island, all the inhabitants were evacuated and the church was closed. A number of the members of this church joined Tallinn First Baptist Church.⁹ On 25th March 1925, Emilie Bertelson joined the Mustvee Baptist Church in East Estonia, where she stayed till the end of her life.¹⁰ The mission-minded spirituality and eager expectation of the Spirit of God to move and work left its mark on Bertelson's later years and ministry, even if she cannot be described as an emotional or enthusiastic type of Christian.

Feeling a calling to Christian ministry, Emilie Bertelson wanted to become a missionary in Africa, where Hindrek Tuttar had worked from 1903-1907.¹¹ Tuttar was a Lutheran who briefly, after his return from the mission field, became a Baptist, and propagated mission ideas in the Estonian Baptist journal *Teekäija*.¹² In the early twentieth century, becoming a missionary was the most logical way for a woman to fulfil her calling for ministry, which included teaching, preaching and serving. However, in 1907-1908, Bertelson had the possibility to travel in Russia, all the way to the Black Sea. This was a life-changing event. She saw poverty and spiritual blindness of the local people, and this was such a profound experience for her that she decided to become a missionary to the Russian people.¹³ From that moment she persistently worked towards her 'dream'. As the future years showed, she became a missionary, though a different kind of missionary than she had thought in the early years of her Christian life.

⁵ Karl Kaups, 'Kojuhüütud ustavaid sulaseid' [The faithful servants who have been called home], in Kaups, *50 aastat apostlite radadel: 1884-1834*, p. 133.

⁶ R. Kaups, 'Kogudused' [Churches] in Kaups, *50 aastat apostlite radadel: 1884-1834*, p. 50.

⁷ Efraim Joel Dahl, *Emilie Bertelsoni elu ja Mustvee tööpõld* [Life of Emilie Bertelson and working field in Mustvee], (Typewritten manuscript, 1982), p. 3. The original document is owned by Aita Dahl.

⁸ Mihkel Uusmann, Harald-Viktor Dahl, *Tallinna I Baptisti koguduse ajalugu 1884-1941* [History of Tallinn I Baptist Church 1884-1941] (Tallinn: typewritten manuscript, 1941), p. 91.

⁹ H.V. Dahl, 'Olemasolu lõpetanud kogudusi', p. 93.

¹⁰ *Mustvee Baptistikoguduse Liikmeraamat. 1936* [Membership book of Mustvee Baptist Church], p. 1. The original document is owned by Mustvee Baptist Church.

¹¹ Karin Hiiemaa, *Südame kutsel: Eesti misjonärid Aafrikas* [On the Calling of the Heart: Estonian Missionaries in Africa] (Tallinn: Olion, 2000), pp. 58-59.

¹² Toivo Pilli, *Eesti baptistid ja nende teoloogilise mõtte kajastumine ajakirjas 'Teekäija' kuni 1940* [Estonian Baptists and Their Theology as Reflected in 'Teekäija' until 1940], ThM thesis (Tartu: Tartu University, 1996), p. 82.

¹³ Nils Angelin, *Ett 'Ebeneser'* [A 'Ebeneser'], in *Länken* [Link], 12 (1928), p. 6.

However, firstly Emilie Bertelson's mission field was Naissaare where she began to work as a Sunday School teacher.¹⁴ In 1912 there were forty-five Sunday School children in her group, which she led alone without any helpers.¹⁵ She gave all her energy to her work, and was not afraid of difficulties. She walked every Sunday between two villages, Eesküla and Tagaküla, to hold Sunday School classes in both villages.¹⁶ This experience was a good preparation for later work when she had to take responsibility and organise church life, often alone.

Emilie Bertelson's job in everyday life is not known. The membership book of Mustvee Church said, in the 1930s, that she was a 'secretary',¹⁷ but we do not know if she was secretary only in the church, taking minutes and being responsible for correspondence, or if she ever earned her daily bread through this job. There is no doubt about her intellectual abilities and skills, but Bertelson's primary focus was always on spiritual ministry. Selma Sarapuu, who was a close friend of Emilie Bertelson and whose home she later rented for prayer services, remembered a story told by Emilie Bertelson's mother: when they lived in Naissaare and people asked her what her daughter was doing, she answered that Emilie was going from house to house and was talking with people.¹⁸ Bertelson's mother was ashamed that her daughter had no 'proper' job. Talking to people – what job is that? According to the Lutheran work ethic, as it was understood at the beginning of the twentieth century in Estonia, this was neither spiritual (pastoral) work nor a fulfilment of one's 'earthly' tasks.

In addition to being an evangelist and Sunday School teacher, Bertelson had an opportunity to engage in more formal theological education. In autumn 1913 she visited Örebro Mission Bible School in Sweden and after this visit she undertook several evangelistic trips in Estonia and Russia.¹⁹ In 1914, Bertelson applied to the Örebro Mission Bible School and studied there for three years. From her time in Örebro a writing book has survived, which helps us to understand which subjects she studied in the Bible school: English, German, biblical exegesis, preaching, practical evangelism, management, and others. The curriculum was designed to keep in mind the basic knowledge and skills which were necessary for missionary work.²⁰ Emilie Bertelson finished the school in 1917 and applied for missionary work in Russia. The Committee of Foreign

¹⁴ Mihkel Uusmann, Harald-Viktor Dahl, *Tallinna I Baptisti koguduse ajalugu 1884-1941*, p. 91.

¹⁵ H.V. Dahl, 'Olemasolu lõpetanud kogudusi', p. 93.

¹⁶ E.J. Dahl, *Emilie Bertelsoni elu ja Mustvee tööpõld*, p. 3.

¹⁷ *Mustvee Baptistikoguduse Liikmeraamat*, 1936, p. 1.

¹⁸ Selma Sarapuu, oral information, 01.05.1999.

¹⁹ Angelin, *Ett 'Ebeneser'*, p. 6.

²⁰ Emilie Bertelson, *Bibelstydium i I och II klass* [Bible studies in I and II class], (Manuscript, 1914). The original document is owned by Mustvee Baptist Church.

Missions of the Swedish Missionary Association did not make hasty decisions. It sent her for one semester to Stockholm Bethel Seminary to complete her education for missionary work. In March 1918 she was accepted and approved as a missionary for Russia.²¹

Knowledge of foreign languages was an important tool for Bertelson in her future ministry. She was already fluent in Estonian, Russian and Swedish. The approximately 300 inhabitants of Naissaare were bilingual, speaking both Swedish and Estonian; around ten per cent of the island's population were unable to speak Swedish²² and Naissaare Baptist Church held their services in Estonian.²³ Bertelson learned Russian because in 1885 Russification began in Estonia.²⁴ In the 1890s, when she went to the village school in Eesküla, the centre of Naissaare, Russian was still well represented in the school curriculum and in official paperwork in society, though there were signs in the wider culture that Russification was losing its grip. Later the knowledge of Russian became important in her work with Russians in Russia and in Estonia. In addition, according to Ilmar and Kethe Kurg, who lived with Emilie Bertelson for seven years until her death in 1965, Bertelson also spoke fluent English and German.²⁵ This opened up to her a wider selection of Christian literature. The knowledge of different languages helped her to minister in multi-ethnic and multi-lingual settings in the Mustvee region in East Estonia with its Estonian and Russian speaking population. Also, her linguistic skills helped her to establish international contacts and to find supporters while serving as a missionary in St Petersburg (1918-1924) and in Mustvee (1925-1965).

A Swedish–Estonian missionary in St Petersburg 1918-1924

Representatives of the Swedish Baptist movement were already in St Petersburg in the nineteenth century. One of the most influential among them was Oskar Elon Signeul. Signeul came from Göteborg and had a French ethnic background. He went to St Petersburg as a fashion designer, working in one Greek company. He became a Christian in 1882 when he was 24 years old. Two years later he was baptised by the leader of the German Baptist Church in St Petersburg, Adam Reinhold Schiewe.

²¹ David Lagergren, *Framgångstid med dubbla förtecken: Svenska baptistsamfundet åren 1914-1932* [A time of sufficiency and miraculous signs: Sweden Baptist Association in 1914-1932], (Libris, 1989), p. 135.

²² A. Ader, *Eesti Usuajalugu: Läänemaa ärkamine ja selle tagajärg* [History of faith in Estonia: awakening in Westland and its results], (Typewritten manuscript, no place, no date), pp. 129-130. The original document is owned by Toivo Pilli.

²³ H.V. Dahl, 'Olemasolu lõpetanud kogudusi', p. 93.

²⁴ *Venestamine*, [Russification], Online: URL: <http://www.s-jaani.ee/okupatsioon.html>, cited 27.09.2005.

²⁵ Ilmar and Kethe Kurg to Daily Valk, (12.05.1999). Private letter. The original document is owned by Daily Adam.

Between 1890 and 1891 Signeul studied at Bethel Seminary in Sweden and went back to St Petersburg as a missionary. He became leader of the Swedish Baptist Church, working together with the German Baptist Church in this Russian capital. When the pastor of the German Church, A.R. Schiewe, was expelled from the country, Signeul became pastor of both churches. He was also responsible for the work among Finns and expanded the Baptist work to Finland (Pargola and Kuokkola). Signeul stayed in St Petersburg during the First World War, in spite of miserable working conditions and restrictions on Christian missions. When tsarism collapsed, there were hopes that new opportunities would open up for evangelism. Many missionaries in America and Sweden prepared for missionary work in Russia.²⁶ However, there were also warning signs that the Bolshevik government would be hostile towards religion.²⁷

The work of Signeul in St Petersburg is only one sign of Swedish missionary interest in Russia. But in the changing political situation, many missionaries gave up the idea of going to this country. Emilie Bertelson, however, confirmed that her ministry should continue in Russia. In August 1918, the Committee for Foreign Mission of the Swedish Missionary Association (CFMSMA) gave its approval for her to go to Russia immediately.²⁸ She wrote about it in her diary 44 years later. She left from Stockholm on 14th September, met her mother in Estonia on 17th September and arrived in St Petersburg the next day.²⁹ But in the political turmoil, all contacts between Emilie Bertelson and CFMSMA were cut off. It wasn't until July 1920 that the Swedes received their first note from Bertelson, whose earlier letters had probably been confiscated. Throughout this time Bertelson had worked in St Petersburg, evangelising and organising Christian work. She even had the opportunity to visit the Baptist conference in Moscow in 1920.³⁰ Even if life and working conditions were poor and difficult Bertelson was able to manage all these things and continue with her mission.

Emilie Bertelson worked in conjunction with the 'House of Gospel' (Dom Evangelija) which was established by William Fetler. Fetler (1883-1957), originally from Latvia and son of a Baptist preacher, started his ministry in St Petersburg with help from Britain. Between 1903-1907 he studied at Spurgeon's College, London. Fetler had a wider vision than, for example, Signeul, who was restricted mostly to the Swedish and German

²⁶ Lagergren, *Framgångstid med dubbla förtecken: Svenska baptistsamfundet åren 1914-1932*, pp. 134-135.

²⁷ Heather J Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution, 1905-1929* (Indiana: University Press 2005), p. 143.

²⁸ Lagergren, *Framgångstid med dubbla förtecken: Svenska baptistsamfundet åren 1914-1932*, p. 135.

²⁹ Emilie Bertelson, *Dagbok*, 20.05.1957-10.12.1962, entry 14-18.09.1962.

³⁰ Lagergren, *Framgångstid med dubbla förtecken: Svenska baptistsamfundet åren 1914-1932*, p. 135.

speaking population. Fetler worked among Russians, building relations with aristocracy and was also known among the ordinary people. He established a Baptist Church in St Petersburg and one in Moscow.³¹ In 1911, the House of Gospel was opened. At the beginning of the First World War Fetler was expelled from Russia, and after the revolution his large church was used by Baptists.³² This House of Gospel was the main working place for Bertelson between 1918-1924.

Emilie Bertelson soon realised that mission work was not only preaching. She was, indeed, involved in evangelism as well as teaching in a Sunday School. Bertelson said that at 'every service people came to pray for forgiveness: sometimes 10, 15, 20, 30 and once even 50 people'.³³ Nevertheless, there were other tasks. She often made home visits. There was also administrative and organisational work that needed to be done. Later she wrote articles in the Swedish journal *Länken* (Link), and described services in stadiums which she organised with local churches.³⁴ The former 'Fetler's Church' went through difficult times. In 1914 there were 500 people in the congregation. By 1918 there were only 60 people there.³⁵ After the war poverty affected the population; many able preachers and leaders were sent out of the country, migrated to Southern Russia or never returned from the war. Many church members left the church and lost their faith. Bertelson was one of the key figures who helped to 'build up' the church again. This took much of her energy, especially as for a while she was practically leading the church work. Later, Ivan N. Šilov moved to St Petersburg and became pastor in the House of Gospel. Šilov and Bertelson worked together, and their efforts began to bear fruit. By 1920 the church had grown to 250 members.³⁶ There were signs of new hope.

Between 1920 and 1922 there was a break in Bertelson's work in St Petersburg. She travelled to Estonia and Sweden, with the aim of speaking about mission work in Russia and to fundraise for the support of Christian ministry there. Bertelson planned to be away from St Petersburg for four months but in reality the trip lasted two years. She was successful in fundraising, travelling from town to town. She was also able to collect clothes, food and medicine. There was another important outcome of her

³¹ *История Евангелических Христиан-Баптистов в СССР* [History of Evangelical Christians and Baptists in the USSR] (Москва: Издание Всесоюзного Совета Евангельских Христиан-Баптистов, 1989), p. 550.

³² Lagergren, *Framgångstid med dubbla förtecken: Svenska baptistsamfundet åren 1914-1932*, p. 134.

³³ E.J. Dahl, *Emilie Bertelsoni elu ja Mustvee tööpõld*, p.4.

³⁴ Emilie Bertelson, in *Länken* [Link], 6 (1930), p. 42.

³⁵ Angelin, *Ett 'Ebeneser'*, p. 6.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

trip. She found Karin Fålen from Krylbo, Sweden, a trained nurse, who felt a call to join Bertelson in her work in Russia.³⁷

With Fålen as a co-worker, the next stage in Bertelson's mission in Russia began. After their arrival in St Petersburg in 1922, the two missionary ladies rented a large room for worship services in one of the main areas of the city. The rent was fifty million roubles per month, a figure which gives some idea of how high inflation was in post-revolution Russia.³⁸ The situation in the country was difficult and problems also arose in the church. However, Šhilov was a capable pastor and the number of church members increased.³⁹ When Emilie Bertelson left St Petersburg in 1924, the congregation had 630 members and the increase continued.⁴⁰

Bertelson became critical of Šhilov's decision to expand the number of paid staff to include two secretaries, three evangelists and five other workers. The staff were paid with food that came from America and Sweden as social aid. Bertelson was concerned that if a considerable amount of this social aid was used to pay the staff, then many poor people were left without help. Nevertheless, Emilie Bertelson and Karin Fålen continued to work together with the congregation.⁴¹ While among Russian Baptists the women's role was downplayed in later development, in the early stages of this movement women had significant roles. Among the Pashkovite movement, which later developed into the Evangelical Christian strand of the Russian Baptists, there were several noblewomen who were key-people in these early stages. Bertelson and Fålen were also allowed a significant role in St Petersburg, though it may have been partly because of their foreign identity and because they were perceived through their missionary rather than pastoral tasks.

The years in Russia broke the health of Emilie Bertelson. She had a serious problem with inflammation in one hand.⁴² Lack of food and extremely miserable living conditions made things even worse. The nerves of the missionary were always tense because of constant attention from officials and persecution, continuously raising difficulties. Karin Fålen was very worried about the health of her co-workers and in December 1923 she wrote that 'Emilie Bertelson is completely stressed out'.⁴³ Nevertheless, her health situation was no reason for Bertelson to give up her work. Trusting God she continued.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Lagergren, *Framgångstid med dubbla förtecken: Svenska baptistsamfundet åren 1914-1932*, p. 135.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ E.J. Dahl, *Emilie Bertelsoni elu ja Mustvee tööpõld*, p. 4.

⁴¹ Lagergren, *Framgångstid med dubbla förtecken: Svenska baptistsamfundet åren 1914-1932*, p. 136.

⁴² H.J. Dahl, *Emilie Bertelsoni elu ja Mustvee tööpõld*, p. 18.

⁴³ Lagergren, *Framgångstid med dubbla förtecken: Svenska baptistsamfundet åren 1914-1932*, p. 136.

Bertelson's time in Russia was drawing to an end for other reasons. Though Evangelicals, unlike the Orthodox, had relative freedom in the 1920s, they did have some difficulties. In 1923 the House of Gospel was taken away from the congregation, though it was given back later. In 1923, fifteen 'brothers' were arrested, including pastor Šilov. The reason for their arrest was probably their anti-militarist stance. Division occurred about this issue, especially after Ivan S. Prohhanov, an outstanding Evangelical Christian leader, wrote an article where he encouraged believers not to refuse military service. This irritated Baptists according to Karin Fålen.⁴⁴ However, there were some joyful events for believers. On New Year's Eve 1923, eleven people were baptised. The worship service, with 2000 people present, lasted six hours.⁴⁵ In the summer of 1923, Emilie Bertelson reported, with a note of optimism, at the Baptist World Alliance Conference in Stockholm:⁴⁶ 'People still become Christians and persecution is not so strong in St Petersburg and in European Russia, although sometimes is very difficult. It is not possible to travel freely and an anti religious attitude from the government is perceptible in every moment.'⁴⁷ But Bertelson had to face another blow. She lost her co-worker Karin Fålen as a result of a disagreement.

The disagreement emerged around a long-term dream of Bertelson to establish a Christian orphanage in St Petersburg. The need for this institution was obvious. People were starving; there were many orphans and homeless people in the city. It is possible that Bertelson was aware of some of the history of the social work of Evangelicals in this city. In the nineteenth century the Pashkovites in St Petersburg, inspired by examples found in the wider European scene, had been involved in many social work projects. Now the situation was different. Bertelson soon had to admit that realising her dream seemed impossible to fulfil.⁴⁸ Even if permission could be obtained, the costs were much higher than the Swedish Baptist Union was able to secure. The government demanded that 'religious propaganda' should not be practised in orphanages. But how could a Christian orphanage operate without any possibility of talking to the children about God? The Swedish Red Cross was ready to help with the costs but they wanted to add their own staff. For some reason, perhaps fearing that the Christian element would be diminished, Emilie Bertelson did not want 'outsiders' to be involved in the project. Bertelson and Fålen had different views about the orphanage. Karin Fålen saw how unsolvable this dilemma

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ *Third Baptist World Congress. Stockholm, July 21-27, 1923. Record of Proceedings* (London: Kingsgate Press, 1923), p. 130.

⁴⁷ Lagergren, *Framgångstid med dubbla förtecken: Svenska baptistsamfundet åren 1914-1932*, p. 136.

⁴⁸ E.J. Dahl, *Emilie Bertelsoni elu ja Mustvee tööpõld*, p. 4.

was, and so she travelled back home in the Spring of 1924, the disagreement with Bertelson being at least part of the reason for her leaving St Petersburg. The CFMSMA decided not to open an orphanage in St Petersburg and informed the agent of the Red Cross about the decision.⁴⁹

In 1924 Emilie Bertelson received orders from the State authorities to leave Russia. She decided to apply for Russian (Soviet) citizenship, which would have allowed her to stay in the country but she was turned down because she was suspected of being a spy.⁵⁰ Bertelson was very committed to her ministry, and at times she was more stubborn than necessary as she strived to reach her goals. However, this time there seemed to be no way for her to continue Christian work in Russia. After she had been interrogated by the Secret Police three times, and been under suspicion of being a spy, she was informed by the authorities of the final date when she had to leave the country. On 25th June 1924 she travelled to Estonia and stayed in Tallinn for some time.⁵¹ Her time in Russia was over and work started in other fields.

The Christian work in the House of Gospel continued. On 31st December 1924, twenty people were baptised and the small group of children, whom Emilie Bertelson had gathered around her, were taken care of by another Swedish lady, Antonina Blomsterlund, who had support from the Swedish Baptist Union at least until 1929.⁵² Then, after 1929, there began some hard years of persecution for Soviet Evangelicals. It is not known what happened to Blomsterlund after 1929 but up to that time Emilie Bertelson had regular contact with her as she tried to arrange for children to go to Estonia, but it became impossible.⁵³

A missionary on the shore of Lake Peipsi

Back in Estonia, Bertelson visited a number of Baptist churches and spoke about her work. She also visited Mustvee, near Lake Peipsi, and villages around it.⁵⁴ She seems to have believed that her stay in Estonia was only temporary, and she would soon return to St Petersburg (then re-named Leningrad). Before she left Russia, some Communists in high positions had promised to help her return.⁵⁵ In 1924 the leadership of the Swedish Missionary Association (SMA) invited her to Sweden as they wanted to

⁴⁹ Lagergren, *Framgångstid med dubbla förtecken: Svenska baptistsamfundet åren 1914-1932*, p. 137.

⁵⁰ *Teated välismaalt* [News from foreign countries], in *Teekäija* [Wayfarer], 10 (1924), p. 156.

⁵¹ Lagergren, *Framgångstid med dubbla förtecken: Svenska baptistsamfundet åren 1914-1932*, p. 137.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

⁵⁴ *Tagasivaade* [Retrospect], (Typewritten manuscript 11.07.1937). The original document is owned by Mustvee Baptist Church.

⁵⁵ Lagergren, *Framgångstid med dubbla förtecken: Svenska baptistsamfundet åren 1914-1932*, p. 137.

send Emilie Bertelson to Brazil to work with Russian immigrants. But Bertelson's elderly mother lived in Estonia, and Emilie did not want to travel to the other side of the world. As a result of discussions, an idea emerged where Bertelson could work in Estonia in Russian-speaking villages. The Lake Peipsi shore seemed to be an ideal region for this.⁵⁶ Another option would have been Narva, the biggest Russian-speaking city in Estonia. But there were already missionaries in Narva, sent by the Örebro Mission Society. In May 1925 the SMA announced that Bertelson's return to Russia was impossible and she was officially assigned to work among Russians in Estonia.⁵⁷ She probably still did not realise that it was not Russia, but the Russian areas in Estonia that would be where she would do the rest of her life's work.

On 9th September 1925 Bertelson visited Mustvee, having in mind for the first time that this may be the place of ministry for her. Thirty-three years later she wrote in her diary how she travelled from Tartu to Mustvee. The roads were muddy, and the houses were grey and tiny. Her first thought was: 'I do not want to be here!' A little later she met the pastor of the Mustvee Baptist Church, Johannes Roodeman, and Sunday School teacher Liisa Hiimets. Also, a member of the church, Fjodor Morozov, had arrived by boat. That night she slept in Morozov's house on a pallet. She received reassurance from God and made a decision to stay in Mustvee, which she reported to the SMA,⁵⁸ who, in turn, guaranteed financial support of 150 Estonian kroons per month. She also had permission to employ one evangelist,⁵⁹ and she stayed in Mustvee until the end of her life in 1965.

The Mustvee Evangelical Baptist Church was young; it had been officially established in 1921, though Baptist missions had reached the area much earlier. The church had a small music group.⁶⁰ The first leader of the church, Johannes Roodeman, had come from the church in Laius-Tähkvere, together with sixteen members of the congregation. Whilst in the Laius-Tähkvere church, Roodeman had been involved in some kind of spiritual controversy, and chose to leave the church.⁶¹ However, paradoxically, this helped at last to establish a church in Mustvee. The first baptism in Mustvee took place in 1922. Roodeman had poor health, and struggled economically, and new energy and leadership was soon needed. In 1925, the same year that Bertelson arrived in Mustvee, Eduard Annert, who had

⁵⁶ Hildegard Tuulik to Daily Valk, (14.05.1999). Private letter.

⁵⁷ Lagergren, *Framgångstid med dubbla förtecken: Svenska baptistsamfundet åren 1914-1932*, p. 137.

⁵⁸ Emilie Bertelson, *Dagbok* 20.05.1957-10.12.1962, entry 09.09.1958.

⁵⁹ Lagergren, *Framgångstid med dubbla förtecken: Svenska baptistsamfundet åren 1914-1932*, p. 137.

⁶⁰ Adeele Kreen, *Peatiikk Mustvee noorte töö-põllult*. [Chapter from mission field of Mustvee youth], in *Elukevade* [The Spring of Life], 8/9, (1920), p. 253.

⁶¹ K. Kaups, 'Kojuhüütud ustavaid sulaseid', p. 129.

just finished at the Baptist Preachers' Seminary, took the pastor's role in the Mustvee Church.⁶² The Baptist church and Baptist mission united their efforts in the area.⁶³ Bertelson also supported the congregation financially through her Swedish contacts.⁶⁴ Soon the congregation started to grow. Anton Kukin, a former member of the Old Believers Church,⁶⁵ after his conversion, worked for many years as a paid Baptist evangelist in this Lutheran, Orthodox and Old Believers setting. Many brothers received help from Sweden and it was possible to rent more prayer houses.⁶⁶ Though Bertelson could be a firm character, she was able to cooperate with the local church and its official leaders and the mission in Mustvee region benefited from this.

For many years, a prayer house in Rajaküla village, and later in a Russian-speaking village Kükita (Kikita), was the centre for evangelism and mission in the area. The Baptist congregation had a rented prayer house in the little town of Mustvee.⁶⁷ But Bertelson's mission and the work of the local congregation were intertwined. In 1926 Baptist services were held in two places – Mustvee and Rajaküla. In addition, there were rented worship rooms in three other places, usually large rooms in surrounding farm-houses.⁶⁸ Bertelson often participated in all or a majority of these five worship services on Sundays. In spite of some opposition, especially from the Old Believers, Bertelson and the local church were able to gain trust among the locals. Bertelson was accepted as a spiritual worker, not only by the Baptist Union and the local congregation, but also by the conservative Orthodox and Old Believers on the shores of Lake Peipsi. Her commitment to faith and personal 'holiness', as well as practical help to local people, spoke louder than her gender.

Bertelson, though never officially a pastor in Mustvee, in practice fulfilled a pastoral role. There were times when the church did not have a pastor or the pastor lived far away. Gradually, it was Bertelson to whom church members came for advice and spiritual support. Alongside this she organised worship services and preached whenever necessary. It was due to

⁶² During Emilie Bertelson's time in Mustvee there served several pastors: Johannes Roodeman (1921-1925), Eduard Annert (1925-1928) and Rudolf Saul (1928-1943) who was chairman of the church board and served in the capacity of pastor, though was not an ordained minister, later Elmar Maranik (1943-1948), again Rudolf Saul (1948-1958), who was now the official pastor, and Ilmar Kurg (1958-1970).

⁶³ E.J. Dahl, *Emilie Bertelsoni elu ja Mustvee tööpõld*, p. 5.

⁶⁴ R. Kaups, 'Kogudused', pp. 83-84.

⁶⁵ Old Believers separated from the Russian Orthodox Church when Tsar Peter I reformed the Orthodox Church in 1656. They did not agree with the reforms, and were persecuted in Russia which caused their migration. In Estonia, there are Old Believers' congregations in Tallinn and Tartu, but mainly on the shore of Lake Peipsi.

⁶⁶ Anton Kukin to Daily Valk, (29.05.1999). Private letter. The original document is owned by Daily Adam.

⁶⁷ E.J. Dahl, *Emilie Bertelsoni elu ja Mustvee tööpõld*, pp. 5-6.

⁶⁸ Lagergren, *Framgångstid med dubbla förtecken: Svenska baptistsamfundet åren 1914-1932*, p. 138.

her commitment that the congregation came through difficult times and grew considerably.⁶⁹ Though it is not possible to say whether it was because of her attitude as a woman or for some other reason, but Bertelson was much more open to team-work than many of the men in the Baptist Union. Bertelson often invited students of the Baptist Seminary to visit Mustvee on evangelism trips. Also, almost all the Baptist Union's travelling preachers visited Mustvee, such as O. Konsa, J. Sikka, E. Roasto, D. H. Matson, and others.⁷⁰

By 1940-1941 the Baptist 'mission fields' on the shores of Lake Peipsi extended from the village of Nina in the South to Iisaku in the North, approximately seventy kilometres. From East to West the work covered twenty-five kilometres, from Lake Peipsi to Lullikatku and Rääbise. In this area there were sixteen mission stations, in Kuru, Kaseää, Avinurme, Lohusuu, Raatvere, to mention only some.⁷¹ Probably, during Bertelson's ministry, there were more mission stations which operated for a shorter period.

Much attention was paid to music and children's work. In 1934 there were three choirs: one Estonian, one Russian and a choir which was accompanied with stringed instruments, probably guitars, zithers and mandolins. There were 300 children in nineteen Sunday School groups operating in different locations.⁷² Bertelson's organisational talents helped to 'synchronise' this ministry: every week Sunday School teachers gathered to discuss the next topic and for prayer.⁷³ In financial terms, though receiving help from Sweden, the mission and the congregation had to be inventive to survive and expand the work. Church members were generally poor and offerings small. In 1927 the women's handicraft society of the congregation organised a lottery.⁷⁴ All items were sold or raffled, which made the event a success.⁷⁵ According to those who knew her, Emilie Bertelson was a great organiser.⁷⁶

⁶⁹ Hildegard Tuulik to Daily Valk, (14.05.1999). Private letter.

⁷⁰ R. Kaups, *Evangelisatsioon* [Evangelisation], in Richard Kaups, (ed.), *50 aastat apostlite radadel: 1884-1834*, p. 25.

⁷¹ *Mustvee Baptisti Usuihingu Protokoll raamat 06.01.1939* [Book of minutes. Mustvee Evangelical Baptist Church 06.01.1939], p. 35. The original document is owned by Mustvee Baptist Church.

⁷² Jaan Bärenson. *100 aastat Emilie Bertelsoni sünnist. E. J. Dahli materjalide põhjal* [100 years from the birth of Emilie Bertelson. On the basis of materials of E. J. Dahl], (Typewritten manuscript, 1984), p. 3. The original document is owned by Toivo Pilli.

⁷³ *Mustvee Evangeeliumi Baptisti koguduse Protokoll raamat 06.01.1935-02.12.1938*. [Book of minutes. Mustvee Evangelical Baptist Church 06.01.1935-02.12.1938], p. 13. The original document is owned by Mustvee Baptist Church.

⁷⁴ *Mustvee Evangeeliumi Baptisti koguduse protokoll raamat 16.09.1926-28.10.1935*. [Book of minutes. Mustvee Evangelical Baptist Church 16.09.1926-28.10.1935], entry 05.06.1927 nr. 17. The original document is owned by Mustvee Baptist Church.

⁷⁵ Ibid., entries: 09.09.1928 nr 27; 11.03.1929 nr 30; 27.08.1929 nr 33.

⁷⁶ Hildegard Tuulik to Daily Valk, (14.05.1999). Private letter.

In 1928, Peeter Võsu, pastor of the Rõngu Baptist Church in South Estonia, wrote about his trip to Mustvee:

Emilie Bertelson is working there like a *man* – on Sundays she has 4-5 worship services: in the morning at 8.30 there is a Sunday School for Estonian children in Rajaküla, where she lives; at 10 o'clock a service in Estonian and right after that is a Sunday School for Russian children. At 4 o'clock there is a service in Mustvee or Kasepää or somewhere else, and sometimes a Russian service in Rajaküla in the evening; there are also worship services during the week.⁷⁷

'She worked like a man' – this evaluation expressed the prejudices of the time. Women were considered to be 'weaker vessels' for spiritual labour. Bertelson's life showed that she was stronger than some of her male co-workers. However, Võsu's expression also includes respect and shows that Bertelson was accepted by Võsu, who was himself a long time minister, as a 'full weight' labourer in the fields of God's Kingdom.

Bertelson also tried her hand as a Christian journalist. From 1927-1935, in co-operation with a Swedish missionary in Narva, Nils Angelin,⁷⁸ she published two journals: *Länken* (Link) in Swedish and *Prizõv* (Call) in Russian. *Länken* was sold mainly in Sweden and among Swedes in Estonia. Its purpose was to speak about missionary work in Estonia and to encourage readers to support this mission. *Prizõv*, containing sermons, Bible studies and stories for evangelism purposes, was distributed among Russian-speaking people in Estonia. These journals, and the news about the mission efforts in Mustvee told from person to person, served as a means of 'public relations' for Bertelson's ministry. Visitors from Sweden and Finland came to learn more about the work, and to help, either financially or with their labour. When a new church building was erected in Mustvee in 1937, there were a number of volunteers who helped with the building and with evangelism. A businessman, K.J. Solberg, made a donation for another prayer house to be bought.⁷⁹ Bertelson also developed social, charitable, moral and cultural life in the region. This was recognised even in the Estonian Parliament.⁸⁰ Bertelson was also famous for her anti-alcohol stance, and that people in a Baptist church had to be non-smokers.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Peeter Võsu, *Üks päev Peipsi kalda tööpõllul* [One day in the working field of Peipsi shore], in *Teekäija* [Wayfarer], 19 (1928), p. 222.

⁷⁸ *Kodu ja välismaa teated* [Writings from home and foreign countries], in *Teekäija* [Wayfarer], 3 (1928), p. 35.

⁷⁹ Lagergren, *Förändringens tid Kris och förnyelse* [Times of change-Crisis and renewal] (Libris. 1994), p. 188.

⁸⁰ Karl Kaups, *Mustvee tööpõllult* [From the mission field of Mustvee], in *Teekäija* [Wayfarer], 3 (1937), pp. 45-46.

⁸¹ Richard Kaups, *Karskuspäevilt* [From days of abstinence], in *Elukevade* [The Spring of Life], 9 (1926), pp. 152-153.

In 1940 and 1941, when Estonia was occupied by Soviet troops and the Second World War reached this northernmost of the Baltic countries, religious life changed in Estonia. Bertelson continued her ministry in Mustvee, but all religious work now took place under atheistic pressures. In 1946, the prayer house in Mustvee was confiscated by the Soviet authorities,⁸² Sunday School work became illegal and mission stations were closed. Support from Sweden was cut off. The phase of Emilie Bertelson's life and ministry from 1940-1965, characterised by her faithfulness in spite of many losses and Communist restrictions, is outside the scope of this paper.

Conclusion

Emilie Bertelson was a missionary, but an exceptional missionary. Though her dream was to devote her life to preaching the gospel to Russians in Russia, her ministry in St Petersburg was comparatively short. She became a missionary in her own country, Estonia, where she worked both among the Estonian and Russian-speaking population near Lake Peipsi. In her ministry she had to fulfil not only preaching tasks, but, if needed, pastoral and counselling roles, not forgetting the roles of fundraiser and organiser.

Perhaps it was the context that made her exceptional, too. Some of the roles she had would have been normal for a female missionary in some far-away country, but were not usually fulfilled by a 'sister' in her home-country. Bertelson, no doubt, had a firm character, extraordinary commitment to the cause of God's Kingdom, and natural intelligence. She was able to gain respect in Mustvee and its surroundings, being highly regarded by the Baptist Union pastors and church members who knew her. She was also well known within the Estonian Parliament because of her great work. Bertelson had leadership skills, including faithfulness, and an ability to work together with different personalities. She successfully evangelised in a field that was exceptional in Estonia – the community of Old Believers, though in the region there also lived Orthodox and Lutherans. Her example has left a lasting impact on the Baptist work in Estonia.

Emilie Bertelson gave all her energy to the ministry that she believed was God's calling for her. She endured hardship. She was able to create a team of co-workers. She was persistent in her tasks. She had compassion

⁸² Toivo Pilli and Tõnis Valk, *Ühest ateistliku töö meetodist: evangeeliumi kristlaste-baptistide palvemajade ja koguduste sulgemine Eestis 1945-1964* [A method of atheistic work: closing prayer houses and churches of the Evangelical Christians and Baptists in Estonia 1945-1964], in Toivo Pilli, ed., *Teekond teiseks ajaks: peatükke Eesti vabakoguduste ajaloost* [Journey in modifying time: Chapters from history of Estonian free churches] (Tartu: Kõrgem Usuteaduslik Seminar ja Sõnasepp, 2005), p. 94.

towards people. She trusted God. She worked like a man; or, rather, accepting her identity and style, she worked like a woman.

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The life and legacy of Strahil Grozdanov (1920-1997) – leader of the Macedonian Baptists in socialist times, 1950-1980

Introduction

In this paper I will look at the life of Strahil Grozdanov, the Baptist preacher and leader of the Baptist movement in southern Serbia and Macedonia during the communist era. The emphasis in his early life will be placed on formative events, which contributed to his future ministry and work. The focus during his young adult life will be on his rise to leadership and his call to ministry, while the last two sections will highlight the key events that defined his ministry. I would argue that it was through Strahil Grozdanov's leadership and commitment during the socialist era, that the Baptist movement in the region of Macedonia was able to survive and develop. In conclusion, I will offer an evaluation both of the contributions Strahil made to Baptist life in this region, as well as some of his shortcomings and failures. Although he was my grandfather, I have attempted to evaluate his life and work with academic objectivity.

1. Birth and childhood (1920-1940)

The 1920s were a period where the evangelical mission in the area of Macedonia had reached its peak, unattainable almost a century later. The early missionaries of the congregational denominations had come to Macedonia in the 1850s, then under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. In the following decades, these missionaries created a network of orphanages, schools and churches which were quickly finding support among the local population. At the turn of the century, when the famous national Ilinden uprising for liberation occurred, over three hundred children orphaned by the uprising were being cared for by missionaries in their centre for Macedonia in Solun (Thessaloniki). The missionaries operated one of the first female high schools in the consular city of Bitola, and also other schools in different towns in Macedonia.¹ The local population was sympathetic to these actions which paved the way for larger numbers to join the churches. The highly publicised kidnapping of missionary Ellen Stone by Macedonian revolutionaries likewise drew attention to the

¹ Strahil Grozdanov, *Kratok istorijat na Evangelskoto dvizenje vo Makedonija od 19-tiot vek ponatamu* [Short history of the Evangelical movement in Macedonia from the end of the 19th century onwards] (Unpublished, 1994), p. 2.

missionary work. It was from some of these Congregationalist missions out of which grew the Baptist communities in Macedonia.²

In Radoviš, the small town of Grozdanov's birth, the church experienced the largest growth, and at the turn of the century grew to a membership of over three hundred people, which was unseen anywhere else in the Balkans at that time.³ With the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, the area of today's Macedonia was annexed by Serbia in 1913, and later the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.⁴ The Serbian Orthodox clergy had taken up a cause to eradicate the sectarian movements under its jurisdiction, and now, with the support of the Serbian militias, it was able to utilise government power, which was also advocating a policy of 'serbianisation'.⁵ This policy produced severe tensions in the land and resulted in the assassination of the Serbian King Alexander by a Macedonian nationalist in Marseille in 1934.⁶ The missionary movement was unable to operate in these circumstances and the churches were left to bear the struggles with the authorities alone. Membership began to decline, partly because people emigrated to avoid persecution, partly from fear of the authorities.

It was in this time of persecution that Strahil Grozdanov, also known by the last name of Zlatanov, was born in a provincial part of what was then the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. He was born near the border with Bulgaria, on 9th May 1920.⁷ His parents Nikola and Magdalina were simple peasant people, working as farmers, cultivating their land and caring for herds of sheep and goats. His mother, Magdalina, had become a member of the congregational church prior to World War I, while his father, Nikola, was Orthodox at the time of their marriage.

Grozdanov was born during the time when large crowds gathering to worship were still present in the evangelical churches. He was, however, even as a child, going to experience some of the hardships of being a Christian, which would follow him throughout his life. When he was nine years old, the militia burnt down the local evangelical church under the encouragement of the Serbian Orthodox priest of the town – Priest Žiko.⁸

² R. Tandy McConnell, *Indigenous Baptists and Foreign Missionaries: Baptist Communities in Romania, Hungary and Yugoslavia 1872-1980* (Doctoral Thesis, 1996), p. 119.

³ Strahil Grozdanov, *Kratok istorijat na razvojt na protestantizmot vo ovoj del od Balkanot* [Short history of the development of Protestantism in this area of the Balkans] (Unpublished, 1984), 1.

⁴ Matjazh Klemenčič and Mitja Zhagar, *The Former Yugoslavia's diverse peoples* (Oxford: ABC-Clio, 2004), p. 140.

⁵ Robert Lee Wolff, *The Balkans in our time* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956), p. 145.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Strahil Grozdanov Personal Documents [Birth certificate, Issued on 17.8.1993, owned by Ivan Grozdanov].

⁸ Grozdanov, *Kratok Istorijat* 1994, p. 5.

There were at least two assassination attempts directed at the pastor of the church, Vladimir Daskalov (himself coming from an ex-orthodox priest's family), in the late 1920s. Although Daskalov survived both attempts, he emigrated first to nearby Strumica, and later to Egypt.⁹ For the next decade the declining membership was left without a place to worship and without a pastor. It was during these hardships, in 1928, that the Radoviš Evangelical Church joined the Baptist Union of Yugoslavia, through the work of Vinko Vacek, the pioneer of Yugoslav Baptists.¹⁰

It is unclear how much influence Vladimir Daskalov had on Strahil. Daskalov was the most highly educated evangelical scholar and pastor to emerge out of Macedonia up until the late 20th century. He studied in Bulgaria and taught maths in Strumica for several years,¹¹ before graduating in philosophy in Germany. He then studied theology in the United States at the turn of the century. He spoke German, English, French and almost certainly Turkish. He was the mayor of Kavadarci, a city in Macedonia, from 1921-1923, when he left to pastor the church in Radoviš, probably from the year 1923, up until the destruction of the church in 1929. For a few years afterwards, he was in the nearby town of Strumica, and could have visited Radoviš easily.¹² Whether there was direct influence by Daskalov on Grozdanov is unclear, but the legacy of Daskalov's powerful intellect and ministry was surely still present in the church in Radoviš, where Strahil was growing up.

In addition to the legacy of Daskalov and the persecution experienced by the church during Strahil's early life, it was probably his father's decision to offer the family house as a meeting place for worship which was to plant lasting impressions on Strahil. In 1932, three years after the loss of the church building, the congregation started meeting again in the family house of Nikola Zlatanov, even though the church had to allow a police officer to be present at every meeting.¹³ From his twelfth to his eighteenth birthday, every meeting, sermon, prayer and song of the congregation would happen under the eyes of Strahil. Nikola, Strahil's father, was never an active preacher, and until this time, there is little evidence he was an active member of the Baptist church he now belonged to. However, Nikola's courage in offering his home as a meeting place at this time enabled the reestablishment of the Radoviš church, and would help pave the way for Strahil's development as the future leader of the

⁹ Strahil Grozdanov, *Kratok istorijat na pojavata na Baptizmot vo Makedonija* [Short History of the appearance of Baptists in Macedonia] (Unpublished, 1988), p. 5; [Short history 1994], p. 5.

¹⁰ John David Hopper, *A History of Baptists in Yugoslavia: 1862-1962* (Doctoral Thesis, 1977), p. 5.

¹¹ Grozdanov, *Kratok Istorijat*, 1984, p. 3.

¹² Strahil Grozdanov, *Kratka biografija na Vladimir Daskalov* [Short Biography of Vladimir Daskalov], (Unpublished, 1977).

¹³ Grozdanov, *Kratok Istorijat*, 1988, p. 11.

Baptists in Macedonia. The life of the church at this time was not easy, and there is at least one recorded incident where Vinko Vacek was thrown out of the pulpit by the authorities in 1933.¹⁴ It was soon after this, in 1934, that Strahil was converted and baptised.¹⁵

In the 1930s another phenomenon taking place in the Balkans was the so-called 'exchange of peoples'.¹⁶ Hundreds of thousands of Turks were leaving the now liberated lands, and other groups of people were moving into their new homelands. Not many people were being moved into Macedonia, but a lot of Turks were leaving it, which meant that a large number of properties went on sale, probably under-priced. In 1938, the Radoviš congregation bought one such property from a departing Turkish family, and dedicated it as the new church building.¹⁷ During this era, there was relative freedom, and the congregation started growing again.

It was in this new church building that Strahil first preached. The lack of trained clergy since the departure of Daskalov meant that those in the congregation who had the greatest biblical knowledge and rhetorical skills would be the ones to lead the worship services. The years spent listening to the services in his father's home would enable Strahil to do exactly that. Although he was engaged in the families agricultural work, he also started visiting and preaching in the neighbouring Methodist church in Rakliš. These two churches provided him with his first flavour of ministry.

Strahil's childhood provided him with both the taste of the glory days of evangelical Christianity in Macedonia and of its coming dark hours. His father's dedication and Daskalov's intellectual legacy were probably the most formative influences in his early development, which provided him with two attributes crucial to his future ministry: commitment and knowledge.

2. The war and rise of communism (1940-1955)

In 1940 the entire landscape was being changed again by the Fascist occupation of much of Europe. At the time of the German invasion of Yugoslavia, Strahil was stationed in the military barracks in Belgrade, where he was captured and imprisoned by the Nazis. The Kingdom of Yugoslavia was to be ruled, in part, directly by Germany, while partly by local puppet states: the Croatian, Serbian and Albanian states, as well as the Bulgarian Fascist regime which had helped in the occupation. Radoviš and

¹⁴ Hopper, *A History of Baptists in Yugoslavia: 1862-1962*, p. 150.

¹⁵ *Za Strahil Grozdanov [About Strahil Grozdanov]*, Archive of the Christian Baptist Church Skopje.

¹⁶ Wolff, *The Balkans in our time*, p. 146.

¹⁷ Grozdanov, *Kratok Istorijat*, 1988, p. 10.

most of Macedonia fell under the jurisdiction of Bulgaria.¹⁸ Strahil was released from prison, and returned to Radoviš, where the Bulgarian orthodox clergy had taken over the running of the local parishes. The methods of Serbian rule in the 1920s were again to be employed over the Baptist and Methodist ‘sects’ in Macedonia. Emigration was seen by many non-Orthodox Christians as the only way out and, in the fall of 1941, Strahil, although mostly motivated by economic struggles, emigrated to Vienna, which was at the time annexed to Germany, to seek work.¹⁹ He stayed there until 1944.²⁰

Towards the end of World War II, Strahil returned home, and planned to expand the farm and herds his family had owned. However, nationalisation quickly followed, and all the family property was confiscated by the Communist government. Strahil was left to search for work in the area for which he was trained – the agricultural industry, and was employed to manage the forest caretakers.

As the communists swept to power, they established an even more brutal system of persecution, where the Party had to control and pressure all social organisations, including religious ones.²¹ One threat was the national movements of each of Yugoslavia’s ethnic communities. The Yugoslav secret police, UDBA, was established, which could monitor, interrogate and liquidate suspected wrongdoers without trial.²²

In a bizarre incident, one of Strahil’s childhood friends, Ljupčo Prgov, had set up a meeting with Strahil to encourage him to join the Macedonian secession movement in 1948. The meeting was being monitored by UDBA, who soon afterwards arrested Strahil.²³ He was interrogated, but the incident was clearly groundless and even the hard to convince UDBA inspectors themselves noted that Grozdanov was not implicated in the organisation. He was quickly released, without being further suspected by the UDBA, but this incident served as an important lesson to Strahil of how to deal with the numerous episodes he would have with the secret police during his ministry under communism. It was probably also a lesson in trust, since in the regime that was being formed,

¹⁸ Wolff, *The Balkans in our time*, p. 202.

¹⁹ Report by the Yugoslav Agency for State Security (UDBA) in the file of Strahil Grozdanov (SG), Radovis, Archive of the Ministry of Interior Affairs of the Republic of Macedonia [A copy available in Ivan Grozdanov’s personal documents]. The UDBA record on Strahil contains almost 300 pages of documented reports by informants, inspectors, during interrogations, as well as intercepted letters sent from or to Strahil during this time.

²⁰ Report, (12.4.1955), SG, UDBA.

²¹ Ernst Halperin, *The triumphant heretic: Tito’s struggle against Stalin* (London: Heinemann, 1958), p. 34.

²² Fred Warner Neal, *Titoism in Action: the reforms in Yugoslavia after 1948* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1958), p. 214.

²³ Report, (14.10.1948), SG, UDBA.

even the closest of friends could turn into secret enemies. Knowing whom to speak to, and what to speak to them about, would be of life importance in the years to come.

As the situation settled, Strahil became increasingly active in his ministry. During these years, he would be the caretaker pastor of four congregations: Radoviš, Skopje, Rakliš (Methodist) and Leskovac (Serbia).²⁴ His good health and youth enabled him to travel the distances often, and it helped him gain the experience he needed. He was already becoming leader of the Baptists in the region, since besides the Leskovac (Serbia), Skopje and Radoviš churches, the closest Baptist church in Yugoslavia was the Belgrade church, some 400 km north of Leskovac. De facto, he had become the only local Baptist preacher in the South Serbia and Macedonia region.²⁵

In 1953 a group of leaders from the Baptist Union, among them Adolf Lehotsky and Ludevik Drobny, came and met with Strahil in his home.²⁶ The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Missionary for Yugoslavia, John Allen Moore, who was providing assistance to the Yugoslav Baptist Union, also visited him in the fall of 1955.²⁷ Seeing the dedication and giftedness of Strahil, they recommended that he leave his state job, and commit to formal theological training at the Baptist Seminary located in Daruvar, Croatia (later moved to Novi Sad, Serbia). Moore promised full financial support for his education and would also try to provide financial support once he took on the role of pastor of these churches in the south of Yugoslavia.

All his life, it seemed that Strahil was being prepared for this, and the call of these people, whom he undoubtedly viewed as men of God – leaders in the faith – was not to be turned aside. At the age of thirty-five, and considered fairly old for a ‘career change’, he committed to the seminary and studied there for the next three years. The years spent in Daruvar and Novi Sad, 1955-1958, gave him a broader perspective on the life of the church.²⁸ With other students of the seminary, annual evangelisation campaigns were held. They visited hundreds of believers and dozens of towns, where they preached the word of God. Strahil graduated as a part-time student in May 1963.²⁹

²⁴ Grozdanov, *Kratok Istorijat*, 1988, p. 12.

²⁵ Prior to the war, Moore noted that the only Baptist church south of Belgrade was the Radoviš church, almost 600km away. McConnell, *Indigenous Baptists and Foreign Missionaries*, p. 146.

²⁶ Grozdanov, *Kratok Istorijat*, 1988, p. 13.

²⁷ *Report*, (7.11.1955) SG, UDBA.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, (16.11.1955).

²⁹ Strahil Grozdanov's Personal Documents [Original diploma, May, 1963, owned by Ivan Grozdanov].

The years at seminary were, nevertheless, also a time when Strahil encountered the dark side of ecclesial life – the politics of struggle and power within the leadership of the Baptist Union. He had grown up in a provincial town and had served in churches of peasants where there was neither trained clergy nor financial gain for the preacher. As he testified later in life, the financial dealings of some of the leaders in the union had come as a shock to him. The internal struggles between Lehotsky and Klem on the one side, and Horak on the other, came to his attention.³⁰ At the time he was probably neither capable nor courageous enough to speak to these old men of the faith, but the seed of discomfort with their leadership had already been sown.

The war and post-war years were important to Strahil's educational development in two major ways: he was educated on how to deal with totalitarian authorities and was trained in the practice of ministry through hands-on experience. The balance between these two would have to be carefully controlled throughout his leadership of the Baptist churches, and that is why these years were crucial to his success at both managing the ministry and dealing with the communist regime's repressive methods.

3. The leadership (1955-1980)

In 1956 Strahil was appointed as the Baptist pastor for Macedonia and southern Serbia.³¹ At the time, there were only between ten and twelve full-time pastors in the fifty-plus Baptist churches in Yugoslavia, so most pastors had a caretaker role in several churches, and it was these select few who were involved in the leadership of the entire Union.³²

Upon returning to Macedonia, the UDBA was on his trail again. Political assassinations and persecution had eradicated most of the nationalists, and a decade of communist rule was establishing some sort of stability of the system. Thus, the authorities turned to other aspects in society considered dangerous – such as religious communities.

Vjekoslav Perica identified that in successful nation-building there is a process of forming a civil religion, which he defines as 'an alloy of myths, quasi religious symbols, cults, rituals, beliefs and practices that secure the nation's legitimacy and convince the people that the system is good'.³³ It entails a myth-narrative about the national origin, struggle and martyrdom, cults of the founding fathers, liberators and heroes, and a sense

³⁰ Grozdanov, *Kratok Istorijat*, 1988, pp. 21-23.

³¹ Hopper, *A History of Baptists in Yugoslavia: 1862-1962*, p. 161.

³² John Allen Moore, *Europe-Whither Bound?* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1951), p. 132.

³³ Vjekoslav Perica, *Balkan idols: religion and nationalism in Yugoslav states* (Oxford: University Press, 2002), p. 95.

of exceptionalism, success, victory and redemption. Perica translated this to the nation-building of Yugoslavia, a complexity of different ethnicities and religions, by the concepts of the myths of the partisan battles during World War II, the core value of brotherhood and unity, the cult of Tito, and exceptionalism through leading the non-aligned movement and sports.³⁴ Naturally, anyone threatening these myth-narratives, such as ethnic nationalists, was seen as a threat. In this regard, Protestants, and other religious communities, challenging the state's unquestionable authority by their faith in the higher authority of God, were seen as offering a completely different worldview. Protestant communities offered an alternative to the dominant civil religion, which meant that they threatened the entire process of nation-building.

Thus, in 1955, the UDBA recorded Grozdanov again in their files and labelled him as a danger to society because of his religious beliefs. He was to be monitored, threatened and, if not repentant, removed from his position. Whilst bigger churches, such as the Catholic and Orthodox, were experiencing pressure, the smaller communities 'could be outrightly persecuted, especially those with direct links with the West'.³⁵ After numerous interrogations and threats, UDBA was convinced that Strahil was 'unrepentant'. In 1959 Asen Palankov, the Methodist pastor in the nearby town of Strumica, had disappeared and was found dead, months later.³⁶ A Methodist woman, working in a police department, had stumbled upon a shortlist of three people in the secret UDBA documents, which listed Asen Palankov, Kiro Buhov and Strahil Grozdanov as the three key people to be 'removed' by the UDBA.³⁷ The pressure in his hometown was growing, and Strahil felt that his life was in danger.³⁸ The president of the local municipality had directly threatened Strahil in a conversation in Radoviš.³⁹

At this time Strahil began to consider moving to Skopje, and he picked two people that he would cooperate with in his ministry. One was Vančo Rusjakov, the Baptist pioneer in Macedonia, who was already in his old age. The other was Kosta Karamazov, the preacher of the local Methodist church, with whom Baptists in Macedonia shared the same roots and close fellowship. The 1948 incident with UDBA had taught Strahil to be careful about his actions, and he sincerely believed that these two people were the ones he could trust.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Wolff, *The Balkans in our time*, p. 550.

³⁶ *Report*, (10.6.1959), SG, UDBA.

³⁷ Ibid., (18.1.1960, 22.2.1960, 29.4.1960).

³⁸ Ibid., (22.11.1958).

³⁹ Ibid., (29.4.1960).

Regarding culture and freedom, Yugoslavia was more free than the other communist countries, especially after the break with the Soviet Union in 1948.⁴⁰ While there was relative freedom for trade and travel, a vigorous anti-religious propaganda campaign tried to keep people out of church.⁴¹ Yugoslavia remained a twilight zone between harsh totalitarianism and western freedom.⁴² The decentralised – federalised government also meant that each local authority could act differently. John Allen Moore, the SBC Missionary to Yugoslavia, wrote that the ‘authorities in Macedonia were more hostile than in the rest of the country, and by limiting work to official church buildings, were preventing the work of the Baptist church’.⁴³ Similarly, while many Baptists were allowed to travel abroad to different conferences, the Macedonian UDBA noted that Strahil ‘did not deserve to go to the congress in Geneva’.⁴⁴

Whilst still considering relocating to Skopje, Grozdanov had asked Karamazov to help him find a property in Skopje for a new church building. What Strahil was unaware of at the time was that Karamazov was an informant of the UDBA, and had filed regular reports about Strahil’s plans and was also instrumental in preventing and postponing the move to Skopje from 1956, when Strahil first asked him to find a property, to 1960, when Strahil finally moved there.⁴⁵ He also asked the UDBA, in a report, that the taxes on the pastors of the Baptist and Methodist churches be increased in order to prevent them from a comfortable living.⁴⁶ Later, with the help of Rusjakov, Strahil managed to buy a property in Skopje.

When he returned to Macedonia, Strahil began to look at the strategic interests of the church, and how to provide better growth. The small town where he grew up no longer had large numbers of Baptist believers. Large migration from rural to urban areas was taking place in the 1950s, which saw the urban population double by 1970.⁴⁷ Most churches throughout Yugoslavia were in the villages, which meant that many had stopped going to church when moving to the cities in the 1950s and 1960s.⁴⁸ There was a ten-per-cent drop in membership in the Yugoslav Baptist Union in a four-year span because of migration, mostly to North America and Australia.⁴⁹ In 1895, missionaries had noted that Skopje had a

⁴⁰ Klemenčić, *The Former Yugoslavia’s diverse peoples*, p. 256.

⁴¹ Wolff, *The Balkans in our time*, p. 552.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 581.

⁴³ John Allen Moore Letters, 2-6, Correspondence with his Mother (3, November, 1955), Skopje, Macedonia (The Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archive, Nashville, Tennessee).

⁴⁴ *Report*, (1.8.1959), SG, UDBA.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.4.1956.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.4.1960.

⁴⁷ John R. Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 294.

⁴⁸ McConnell, *Indigenous Baptists and Foreign Missionaries*, pp. 172-174.

⁴⁹ *EBPS*, Feb 20, 1970; 70:48.

good central geographic position to reach the whole of the central Balkans, and, similarly, Strahil decided also that it would be good to move to Skopje, the capital of Macedonia, which, in the long run, prevented the dying out of the Baptist community in the area.⁵⁰ In November 1960 he bought a house, with the aid of the Baptist Union, and decided to establish it as a centre for the Baptist mission in Macedonia.⁵¹ Like his father before him, Strahil held services in a room in his home that he dedicated to the church for the next twenty-five years.

This move, while strategically important, also helped him move away from the constant pressure of the UDBA which he was experiencing in Radoviš. The local police officers in Skopje were not directly familiar with his life, and there were not many followers to be wary of. As was the standard procedure of the UDBA, they employed informants that were close to the suspect to monitor his activities.⁵²

This seemed like the new beginning Grozdanov was looking forward to, but the authorities soon threatened Strahil and sent him to court over the new property. UDBA inspectors, through Karamazov's reports, learned about Strahil's anxiety about the possibility of the UDBA confiscating the property, and were using this information to set up a meeting with him and threaten him further.⁵³ Years later, it took a decision by the Yugoslav High Court not to confiscate the property, before the threats that it would be seized were stopped, which was no earlier than August 1964.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, even in these four difficult years, Grozdanov was able to continue with Baptist activity and consolidate the Skopje mission as a centre for work in the region.

At this time, the church began to grow and Strahil was taking care of the Radoviš and Leskovac churches until the 1970s, and also frequently ministering in the Methodist churches in Strumica, Kolečino and Skopje.⁵⁵ There were significant signs of activity in the church, and even the secret police noticed that 'in contrast with the Methodist church it has quite lively activity lately'.⁵⁶

In the 1960s several new Baptist churches in this region were established.⁵⁷ Throughout his ministry in all of these churches, Strahil had a

⁵⁰ Christ Anastasoff, *The Truth About Macedonia: American Missionaries' Testimony* (Indianapolis: MPO, 1964), p. 31.

⁵¹ *Report* (16.11.1960), SG, UDBA.

⁵² Neal, *Titoism in Action: the reforms in Yugoslavia after 1948*, p. 220.

⁵³ *Report*, (4.1.1962, 10.5.1962, 10.6.1963), SG, UDBA.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, (13.8.1964).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, (28.2.1957).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, (24.5.1963).

⁵⁷ McConnell, *Indigenous Baptists and Foreign Missionaries*, p. 150.

special emphasis on educating the children. In a few of his sermons preserved in the UDBA police record, he repeatedly encouraged members to bring their children to the special children's lessons he would hold.⁵⁸ It was to this ministry that Strahil would devote much of his energy. His experience as a child in the home of his father had theologically projected into him the importance of educating children in the faith of their parents.

His ministry also had a strong emphasis on the devotional life. Reading scripture, and morning, evening and meal-time prayer, were all indispensable parts of the life of faith. Every meal time of the family would begin with a prayer and reading from the Bible, and it would end with a song. In his testament to his children and grandchildren he urged them to do three things: a daily reading of the Bible, a daily prayer hour, and to do the above two with real faith in God.⁵⁹ It was this attitude that propelled him as a pastoral figure in all of the churches he visited. He was a very pastoral and approachable man, taking care of the needs of the people, which made him a likeable man by the members of the churches in which he served. His theology, in spite of being trained in a seminary, never reached the academic sophistication of some of his peers. In one of his writings, for example, he confuses the theological term amillennialism with a realised eschatology meaning.⁶⁰ His knowledge of academic theology was also limited by his lack of speaking a world language, thus limiting his use of theological literature.⁶¹ But for the people he was caring for, this meant very little. The repressive communist system had set in motion difficult living standards for Christians, and it seems that in those times deeper theological contemplation was not a priority. Installing hope and giving them care and love was top priority for people in these circumstances, and this is what Strahil was best at, devoting his life to practical ministry.

He was also trying to develop a significant literature ministry. Publication of Christian literature in Yugoslavia at the time was strictly monitored, and often outright censored. In his contacts with the other Baptist leaders throughout Yugoslavia and Europe, he managed to smuggle in some of the literature being printed abroad. In an intercepted letter by the secret police, he also asked for brochures in the Bulgarian language, which could be more easily smuggled into Bulgaria across the Yugoslav-Bulgarian border, than from the West to Bulgaria.⁶² He was arrested and

⁵⁸ *Reports*, (25.12.1956, 7.12.1956, 28.2.1957), SG, UDBA.

⁵⁹ Strahil Grozdanov, *Preporaka [Legacy]* (Unpublished, 1994), p. 1.

⁶⁰ Grozdanov, *Kratok Istorijat*, 1988, p. 16.

⁶¹ He spoke only Serbo-Croatian and Turkish.

⁶² *Reports*, (undated, 1967; 9.7.1970), SG, UDBA.

threatened at least once for distributing brochures with 'religious propaganda' in 1966.⁶³

Despite the regular arrests and interrogations by the UDBA, Strahil managed to escape from serving a lengthy prison sentence throughout his ministry. This was partly due to certain circumstances. In July, 1963 a huge earthquake destroyed Skopje, and at the time Strahil was on trial for not reporting a foreign preacher, an accusation to which he admitted.⁶⁴ The UDBA filed a lawsuit against him, but Yugoslavia was in desperate need of assistance from western countries to rebuild Skopje, and the petition against Strahil was blocked by the Secretary of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia, because it could put a strain on relations with western donors.⁶⁵

1963 also signified considerable changes in the ministry of Grozdanov. His house and the meeting place of the church were damaged and he sought immediate aid from the Baptist Union.⁶⁶ The Union Secretary, Stipe Orčić, had asked for pictures of Skopje and the damaged property to advertise abroad, but no aid was ever to reach Skopje Baptist Church. A missionary had sent a small amount directly to Grozdanov for repairing the house, but Orčić demanded immediate transfer of the funds to the Union centre in Novi Sad. Strahil was reluctant to do this, and was visited in Skopje by three Union representatives, Klem, Sladaček and Balog on 8th October 1963, when it was agreed that this same amount of money could be spent in Skopje.⁶⁷ Strahil's became impatient with some of the Union leadership because, though he could not prove it, he was convinced that more aid had come to the Union office in Novi Sad, but was never transferred to the Skopje Church.⁶⁸ Trust between the leaders and Strahil was beginning to crumble.

In November 1963, just a few months after the earthquake, the Baptist Union leadership held a meeting in Šid. Over ninety delegates were present, and Strahil felt that perhaps some of them would support his criticism of the current leadership. He confronted Lehotsky, Klem and Orčić about their financial dealings, and directly opposed their continued leadership. The conference ended up in disagreement, but the leadership did not change. Later, Strahil complained to John A. Moore about the pressure that Lehotsky, Klem and Orčić were putting on him, but it seems there was little Moore could do.⁶⁹ By April, 1965, the three decided that

⁶³ Ibid., (21.5.1966).

⁶⁴ Ibid., (6.3.1964; 8.5.1965).

⁶⁵ Ibid., (15.12.1964).

⁶⁶ European Baptist Press Service (EBPS), 29 August 1963, 63:269.

⁶⁷ Grozdanov, *Kratok Istorijat*, 1988, p. 22. *Report* (16.10.1963), SG, UDBA.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 22.

⁶⁹ *Report*, (15.12.1964), SG, UDBA.

Strahil should be removed from the payroll of the Baptist Union, and cancelled his salary sometime in mid 1965.⁷⁰

The decision to remove Strahil from the payroll was also based on the decrease in funds coming in from the SBC, which had financed most pastors in Yugoslavia until 1965.⁷¹ While this was clearly a problem, Strahil was convinced that this was a reprisal for his criticism of the three leaders. While the funding was decreased, it was up to the Baptist Union leadership to strategically decide who would stay on the payroll. Even if it was not a reprisal, leaving the entire southern Serbia/Kosovo/Macedonia region without any paid personnel was an unreasonable strategy.

Left without an income, Strahil sought work again in the agricultural industry. In June 1965 he found work at St. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, working as a student relations clerk.⁷² This employment, in a government institution, was to be quickly condemned by the UDBA, but childhood friends in authoritative posts in the university stood up for him, and he remained in the job until his retirement in 1979.

During these years Strahil's political thinking never came to the forefront of his life. At times he was critical of the communist government, and there is some evidence that he called the Yugoslav President, Josip Broz Tito, a 'missionary of evil', after Skopje's earthquake in 1963.⁷³ Earlier, however, he had some hope that the repressive elements were in the lower echelons of the communist authorities, and he had written a letter of complaint to Tito in 1959.⁷⁴ The religious code of the land strictly prohibited the use of religious propaganda for 'anti-constitutional purposes', a phrase which could have easily been twisted around.⁷⁵ As the UDBA abused this Article 313 to harass him, he became more and more convinced that this was an evil regime from the top to the bottom.

He was again arrested, interrogated and threatened in April 1965. The inspectors were, however, worried that he might discover the main informant, since almost all of the damaging information had come from Strahil's trusted friend Karamazov.⁷⁶ After his release, Karamazov was puzzled, and in a report to the UDBA wrote that for 'about a month or so, Grozdanov is very quiet' and has 'ceased to speak unfavourably' of the

⁷⁰ Ibid., (28.4.1965).

⁷¹ EBPS, 19 August 1964, 64:246-E; Sept 25, 1965, 65:270.

⁷² Report, (7.11.1965), SG, UDBA.

⁷³ Ibid., (7.12.1963).

⁷⁴ Strahil Grozdanov Personal Documents, *Letter to Tito* (24.7.1959).

⁷⁵ Stella Alexander, *Church and State in Yugoslavia since 1945* (Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 220.

⁷⁶ Report, (24.4.1965), SG, UDBA.

government.⁷⁷ Whether Strahil realised the source of the information to the UDBA, or had decided to keep quiet in front of everybody, remains unclear. Either way, in the next decades Strahil enjoyed less harassment because he no longer spoke his mind, even in front of Karamazov.

Until 1980 he continued to lead the church that he had established in his home in Skopje. It was a small church, but as his children reached maturity, it started to experience growth among the student population in the 1970s. His focus was primarily on reaching out to university students.⁷⁸ He continued to help in the churches in Radoviš and Leskovac, although there were now other people involved in ministering to these churches as well.

The leadership years of Strahil's ministry were marked by both achievements and shortcomings. He persevered through the problems with the Union leadership and the UDBA to establish the Skopje Baptist Church as a centre for South Yugoslavia's mission. He helped train and empower local leaders in the churches under his care, which provided future ministers and pastors in these churches, and established a literature ministry in the region. He did not manage to stay in full-time ministry, and this limited the time and energy he could spend on ministry, which had an impact on the results.

4. Late life (1980-1997)

In 1980, Strahil turned 60, and the church finally moved out of his house, although it wasn't until 1987 that the church had its own property. Strahil stayed active in the leadership of the church, although his role had significantly diminished. His sons Ivan and later Samoil, as well as others, helped in the leadership of the church. Strahil helped them in their work until the late 1980s, when he completely withdrew from church work, because of his age and ill health.

In his latter years he devoted himself to a quiet existence and the support of the new leadership in the church. He set out to write several works, most of which were never published. These dealt with the history of the Baptist movement in Macedonia, the work of the Baptist churches he was leading, and his own personal memoirs. In 1990 the communist government was toppled, and he enjoyed greater freedom until his death. But even before the fall of communism in Yugoslavia, the UDBA file on Grozdanov was closed on the 4th April 1990, with the final remarks of the inspectors that throughout more than forty years of monitoring, the suspect

⁷⁷ Ibid., (17.6.1965; 10.11.1965).

⁷⁸ Ibid., (19.10.83).

was not proven to be a danger to society.⁷⁹ The secret police of the communist government admitted it had committed a useless witch-hunt. The conclusion that 'not only did these religious minorities have nothing to do with nationalism, ethnic conflict, genocide, and ethnic cleansing, but they, by and large, supported the six-republic as a common house for all', came too late for this generation of protestant Christians.⁸⁰

Strahil died in 1997 and left behind his wife, Marika, two sons and three daughters. In 2000 the secret police file on his life was made public to his family. He was spared the confirmation that many of his neighbours, friends and co-workers had been secretly monitoring his every move. Even his closest friend, Kosta Karamazov, the Methodist preacher in Skopje in the 1960s, and the current leader of the Methodist Church in Macedonia, Mile Cekov, were working with the government to aid their harassment of Strahil.⁸¹ In one of his last articles Strahil wrote about the realisation that many of the people close to him had worked against him, together with the UDBA: 'God was protecting me in a miraculous way and gave me the courage to hold on, and stay faithful to God until today'.⁸² He wrote that there were many 'sheep in wolf's clothing' even among the Christian flock, but that still for him, there was nothing as beautiful as being with Christians.⁸³ In a letter to a friend, he said: 'there is nothing more beautiful than when a person is among believers, and in this circle enjoys spiritual songs, prayers, rituals and sermons'.⁸⁴ It is here where Strahil felt at home and at peace.

Strahil's legacy was one of self-sacrificing dedication to ministry in spite of external circumstances which were extremely difficult. His theological legacy is not one of academic sophistication, but practical devotion. His times in Yugoslavia were marked by limited ability to pursue advanced theological contemplation, and the persecution of society was seen as testing one's faith. Grozdanov was not against academic learning, which he tried to pursue himself, but the circumstances and needs led him more towards pastoral care for the needy believers in those times. The centre of his ministry was always people, and his pastoral character left a lasting mark on many believers under his care. He was successful in securing the survival of the Baptist community in Macedonia when it was faced with real existential questions. Finally, by his respect for the authorities and informants, he showed a Christ-like example of forgiveness

⁷⁹ Ibid., (4.4.1990).

⁸⁰ Perica, *Balkan idols: religion and nationalism in Yugoslav states*, p. 14.

⁸¹ *Report*, (10.10.1986), SG, UDBA.

⁸² Grozdanov, *Kratok Istorijat*, 1994, p. 7.

⁸³ *Letter*, (undated), SG, UDBA.

⁸⁴ Ibid., (9.8.1970), letter to Korneli.

and love towards those that harmed him. He was a leader who demonstrated skills, not only as a good preacher and teacher, but in being a good example and friend.

Conclusion

Grozdanov's life spanned across some of the most turbulent and dangerous times for Christians in recent years. When people remember his legacy, they often remember his meek character and patience. His ministry, however, had both success and failure.

Strahil was especially instrumental in the establishment of the Skopje Baptist Church, which prior to his coming was just a small home church of Vančo Rusjakov. The vision he had of moving to the third largest city in former Yugoslavia preserved the church when many rural churches were dying out because of persecution and migration. He was also instrumental in leading the entire Baptist movement south of Belgrade for over twenty-five years, where during and after his ministry, several churches were strengthened and have emerged as successful mission points for Baptist life.

There were, however, failures and shortcomings. The times he lived in were difficult, and perhaps not much could have been done, but it remains true that the church under his leadership did not achieve spectacular results. The growth of the church in Skopje happened largely towards the end of his ministry, in the 1970s, when other people, namely his oldest son Ivan, became more active in the ministry. He was also not a very successful church diplomat, and his conflict with the Baptist Union ended in tragedy, not only for his own personal call to ministry, but also to the entire mission movement in the south of Yugoslavia. Being removed from the payroll in 1965 meant that there were no long-term paid clergy in the Baptist churches south of Belgrade, a geographical area spanning 600 km by 300 km, and with an estimated population of 5.5 million for the next fifteen years. It did not destroy the ministry, because of Strahil's sheer dedication, but it did limit the time he could spend on church work. His attempt to gather more aid for the destroyed city of Skopje in 1963 and especially for the Baptist Church was not very successful, because of the conflict and, perhaps, personal interests of the leadership of the Yugoslav Baptist Union.

It is interesting to note that Strahil's theological legacy was emphasised in three important ways: a personal devotional life, the community of believers, and the responsibility towards the faith development of children. The personal reading of scripture and prayer life

was something he cherished dearly, and it gave him hope and courage to live out his faith in difficult circumstances. His appreciation of the community around him, his deep affection for the gathering of the believers, as noted in his letters, was something felt when in his presence. And his repeated emphasis that preaching should also include children, demonstrates an important corrective in many of the Baptist churches of our time. He devoted at least as much, if not more time to children than he did to adults. Both of his sons, Ivan and Samoil, are currently pastoring Baptist churches.

The circumstances of his life, also taught Strahil to cherish the blessings and endure everything that happens in life. In a letter to a friend in 1966, at the height of the pressure against him, he wrote: 'I teach my children even now to be content with what they have, and not to seek for more. Everything that comes is from God, and has to be endured. We should all teach our children likewise'.⁸⁵

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⁸⁵ Letter, (17.2.1966), SG, UDBA.

Rebirth in the Valley of Shadow: Churches of Ethnic Germans in Kazakhstan after World War II

Introduction

The first Baptist Church in Kazakhstan was founded in 1903 by Russian settlers.¹ Until World War II, there were no known German Churches in this huge region with its harsh climate, but thereafter the ethnic structure of Baptist Churches underwent significant changes. In the 1980s, 90% of the Evangelical Christian-Baptist (ECB) Churches in Kazakhstan consisted of Germans.² In fact, after the war Kazakhstan and Middle Asia³ became the midpoint of German Church life.⁴

The development up to this point was not a continuous one. The Soviet Germans walked from the 1930s to 1950s through a deep valley of shadow. In the 1950s all German Churches in Kazakhstan from ECB to Catholic started from a new place with mostly new people. Taking into account the deepness of the valley of shadow, we can speak about a rebirth, not expansion.

In the Clutches of the Communist Regime

People: From Privileged to Persecuted

Germans are known in Russia from of old. In 1789 a group of Mennonites from West Prussia settled in South Russia on the invitation of the Empress Catherine the Great.⁵ The invitation included a special privilege with exemption from military service ‘in perpetuity’, economic benefits, and with the expectation that the settlers would not proselytise their neighbours. Mennonites were a marginal group among the German intensive migration

¹ V. Dik, *Svet Evangeliya v Kasakhstane. Evangel'skie techeniya v pervoi polovine XX veka* [The Light of the Gospel in Kazakhstan. Evangelical Movements in the First Half of the XX Century] (Steinhagen: Samen Korn, 2003), p. 109.

² Ya.F. Trofimov, ‘Khristianstvo kak faktor sokhraneniya etnokul'turnykh traditsii’ [Christianity as Factor of Maintaining Ethno-Cultural Traditions], in *Kul'tura nemtsev Kazakhstana: istoriya i sovremennost': Materialy mezhdunarodnoi nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii, Almaty, 9-11 oktyabrya 1998 g.* [The Culture of Germans in Kazakhstan in History and Present: Materials of an International Scientific and Practical Conference] (Almaty, 1999), pp. 122-7, 125.

³ Middle Asia includes the republics of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. Central Asia is comprised of Middle Asia plus Kazakhstan.

⁴ The author is grateful to the research group, gathered around the Frankenthal Mennonite Brethren Church and Hilfskomitee Aquila in Germany, and especially to Viktor Fast for helpful insights into the life of German settlers.

⁵ P.M. Friesen, *Die Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Bruderschaft in Rußland (1789-1910) im Rahmen der mennonitischen Gesamtgeschichte* (Halbstadt: Raduga, 1911, repr. Göttingen: Verein zur Erforschung und Pflege des Kulturerbes des rußlanddeutschen Mennonitentums, 1991), p. 73.

but they were the first faith community of a classic Free Church type in Russia.

The German settlers in South Russia were an ideal soil for pietistic seed. In 1845 pastor Eduard Wüst initiated a pietistic revival in several Lutheran and Mennonite villages⁶ resulting in the organisation of the Mennonite Brethren (MB) Church in January 1860. The MB's were instrumental in founding the first German Baptist Church consisting of former Lutherans (1864)⁷ as well as the first Russian Baptist Churches (1869)⁸ in South Russia, now Ukraine.

In time, the protection offered by the privileged status of a German colonist melted faster than expected by the settlers. During World War I, with Russia and Germany as two big rivals, the situation of native Germans in Russia became alarming. From this time there was distrust and suspicion towards the German population in Russia.

The Bolshevik revolution made things worse. Collectivisation and religious persecutions, which started in 1929, destroyed the traditional community structures as well as churches. These intensified political repressions led to the martyrdom of many church leaders and ordinary members in 1937-38. Reliable statistics are missing, but there are some vivid examples. For example, in the Mennonite colony of Neu-Samara near the Ural Mountains which consisted of fourteen villages with three Mennonite Churches, 177 men were shot in these two years.⁹

World War II completed the picture of devastation. The Soviet Union became involved in the war in June 1941. Two months later, in August 1941, all Soviet citizens of German nationality of the European part of the USSR – almost 900,000 persons¹⁰ – were deported to Kazakhstan, Middle Asia and Siberia. They were considered potential Nazi collaborationists and put under strict supervision until 1956. People were forbidden to leave their locations under threat of long-term imprisonment. They were made enemies of their country, which had been their home for many generations.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 168-86.

⁷ J. Pritzkau, *Geschichte der Baptisten in Südrussland* (Odessa, 1914, repr. Lage: Logos, 1999, new pagination), pp. 26-7.

⁸ *Istoriya evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov v SSSR* [History of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists in the USSR] (Moscow: Vsesoyusnyĭ sovet evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov, 1989), p. 66; Pritzkau, *Geschichte der Baptisten in Südrussland*, p. 27.

⁹ *Neu-Samara am Tock (1890-2003). Eine mennonitische Ansiedlung in Russland östlich der Wolga* (Warendorf, 2003), pp. 5-10.

¹⁰ *Deportation, Sondersiedlung, Arbeitsarmee. Deutsche in der Sowjetunion 1941 bis 1956*, eds. A. Eisfeld and V. Herdt (Cologne: Wissenschaft und Politik, 1996), p. 113.

Up to one quarter of them did not survive Stalin's persecutions between 1929 – 1953.¹¹

State: Ruling with an Iron Hand

When the Soviet Union entered World War II, the religion in the Soviet Union was not fully conquered although most of the Churches of Baptists and Evangelical Christians in the country, with an estimated membership from 800,000 (conservative estimations of Baptist researchers)¹² to 2,100,000 (intentional estimations of anti-religious authors),¹³ were eliminated. Most of the churches were forced into illegality or ceased to exist. Taking into consideration big cities, only four legal Churches of Evangelical Christians or Baptists remained¹⁴ to serve as a proof of freedom of conscience for foreigners. One of them, the Church of Evangelical Christians in Moscow, was led by Mikhail Orlov, a person with a stable reputation as a KGB collaborator.¹⁵ Since 1937 he had also led the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians.¹⁶ The Baptist Union was dissolved in 1935 when the last of its leaders was arrested.¹⁷

During World War II, the attitude towards religion in the Soviet Union changed. In 1943, the Russian Orthodox Church received back the Patriarchate;¹⁸ in 1944 the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians and Baptists (AUCECB) was organised.¹⁹ Special governmental institutions, the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church led by a KGB general,²⁰ and the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults were created in

¹¹ V. Krieger, 'Die demographische Entwicklung der Deutschen in der Sowjetunion der Jahre 1926-1959' in *Heimatsbuch der Deutschen aus Russland 2003*, ed. H. Kampen (Stuttgart: Landsmannschaft der Deutschen aus Russland, 2003), pp. 9-21, 20.

¹² Interview of S.N. Savinskiĭ with J. Dyck, December 1996.

¹³ A.L. Klibanov, *Klassovoe litso sovremennogo sektantstva* [The Class Face of the Contemporary Sectarism] (Leningrad: Priboĭ, 1928), pp. 15-16.

¹⁴ Beseda s predstaviteliymi 'Orgkomiteta' 23 marta 1966 g. [Meetings with the Representatives of the 'Orgkomitet' on 23 March 1966] Archive of AUCECB, file 28.10, document nr. 3 (electronic copy), p. 10.

¹⁵ [Yu.F. Kuksenko,] Nashi besedy. [Our Conversations] Interview with V.P. Ivanov, Manuscript (2002). J. Dyck's personal archive, p. 17.

¹⁶ S.N. Savinskiĭ, *Istoriya evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov Ukrainy, Rossii, Belorussii: Chast' II (1917-1967)* [History of the Evangelical Christians Baptists of Ukraine, Russia, Belorussia: Part II] (St. Petersburg: Bibliya dlya vsekh, 2001), p. 135.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 133.

¹⁸ D.V. Pospelovskii, *Russkaya pravoslavnaya tserkov' v XX veke* [The Russian Orthodox Church in the XX century] (Moscow: Respublika, 1995), pp. 187-188.

¹⁹ Vsesoyuznoe soveshchanie evangel'skikh khristian i baptistov v Moskve s 26 po 29 oktyabrya 1944 g. (Zapisi zasedaniĭ). [All-Union Conference of Evangelical Christians and Baptists in Moscow 26-20 October 1944 (Session recordings)] Typewritten manuscript. Archive of AUCECB, file 11a, document 1 (electronic copy).

²⁰ Pospelovskii, *Russkaya pravoslavnaya tserkov' v XX veke*, p.188f.

September 1943²¹ and July 1944²² respectively. Their representatives were installed in all regions of the country, to serve as a front-desk institution of the state in matters of religion. To what extent the security services were involved in religious matters is unclear, but the fighters of the invisible front, as the KGB agents often referred to them, left traces on the battlefield against religion.²³ At least in the 1970s departments for combating religion existed in the regional branches of the KGB.²⁴ In reality politics was determined behind the scenes by the Central Committee of the Communist Party, as the former inspector of the Council for Religious Affairs, E. Tarasov, admitted.²⁵

Religious freedom was controlled using three different instruments: a very restrictive law, special permission for topics not regulated by the law, and legalisation of a church that could be granted or withdrawn without clearly defined reasons. The Law on Religious Organisations was issued in 1929, and, with minor changes, remained valid until the end of the Soviet Union in 1991. It defined a uniform structure of a religious organisation without making differences between a Baptist or Orthodox Church and a Mosque and without giving them the status of a legal body. Explicitly forbidden were 'special meetings for children, youth, women, as well as prayer and other meetings'.²⁶ For fellowship-oriented faith communities like Baptists, Evangelical Christians and Mennonites, these restrictions were especially hard. Over the years, however, the interpretation of the law changed, becoming more flexible especially after the disempowerment of Khrushchev in 1964 and after the Helsinki Agreement in 1975.

Faith communities: Strategies of Survival

Even under the described conditions, a remnant of believers remained. Not all of them could be shot, but almost all church leaders went through the circles of the Gulag hell; many of the ordinary church members followed them, leaving a feeling of deep fear until the end of their lives. All wanted to survive.

²¹ Pospelovskii, *Russkaya pravoslavnaya tserkov' v XX veke*, p. 189.

²² Vsesoyuznoe soveshchanie, p. 20.

²³ Beseda s predstaviteleyami 'Orgkomiteta', 13-15.

²⁴ G. Vins, *Evangelie v usakh* [Gospel in Chains] (Elkhart, IN: Russian Gospel Ministries, 1991), p. 130.

²⁵ Interview of E.A. Tarasov with J. Dyck, 2 January 2001. Phonogram. J.Dyck's personal archive.

²⁶ 'Postanovlenie VTSIK i SNK RSFSR o religioznykh ob 'edineniyakh' *Byulleten' Narodnogo komissariata vnutrennikh del RSFSR № 37(338) ot 24 oktyabrya 1929 g.*, pp. 685-689. [Regulation of the All-Union Central Executive Committee and the Soviet of People's Commissars about religious associations. Bulletin of the People's Commissariat of internal affairs of RSFSR № 37(338) from 24 October 1929]. Archive of AUCECB, file 1.1, document 1 (electronic copy).

The first survival strategy was patriotism. The German aggression against the USSR in 1941 gave the remaining church leaders the possibility to express their patriotic feelings. All the documents of the time in the archive of the AUCECB show this attitude. Six days after the war began on 28 June 1941, the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians (AUCEC) issued a circular letter with an unambiguous commitment to military service and an appeal to all believers to 'increase tenfold the commitment to work'.²⁷ The legitimacy of military service was defended by examples of the puritans and 'Oliver Cromwell, the great man of God', as well as the American Civil War against slavery. This appeal was followed by a series of similar documents, with some of them²⁸ even printed in typography – the sign of a benevolent attitude from the state. Christian patriotism bore its fruits.

The second strategy was absolute loyalty. To some extent, during the war, the religious policy of the state changed, and from 26-29 October 1944 a Conference of Evangelical Christians and Baptists in Moscow took place.²⁹ Ten of thirty-four participants were from Moscow, six from Kiev, and the remainder from differing locations. The representative from North Caucasus came from Arkhangel'sk³⁰ in northern Russia, probably from prison. The Conference proclaimed the foundation of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christian and Baptists. Until 1991, this organisation represented the Baptist Union of the USSR. Later it split into Baptist Unions of the independent post-soviet republics. A short Statute of the Union of Evangelical Christians and Baptists,³¹ consisting of ten topics mainly of doctrinal nature, was adopted and an institute of senior presbyters was introduced. In August 1945, this Union was joined by the Pentecostals.³² In this way, the government established an instrument for

²⁷ Circular Letter of the AUCEC № 457/57 from 28 June 1941. Archive of AUCECB, file 1.1, document 159 (electronic copy).

²⁸ Pis'mo po voennomu voprosu k evangel'skim khristianam i baptistam v SSSR [Letter on Military Issue to Evangelical Christians and Baptists in the USSR], circular letter of AUCEC and B from end of 1942; Vsem evangel'skim khristianam i baptistam, nakhodyashchimsya pod gnetom nemetsko-fashistskikh okkupantov [To All Evangelical Christians and Baptists Who Are Under the Yoke of German-Fascist Occupants], circular letters with identical title of AUCEC and B from April 1943 and from 05 January 1944; Vsem obshchinam evangel'skikh khristian i baptistov v mestnostyakh, osvobodennykh ot nemetskoï okkupatsii [To All Congregations of Evangelical Christians and Baptists in Regions Liberated From the German Occupation]. Archive of AUCECB, file 1.1, documents 156, 161, 150, 151 respectively (electronic copies).

²⁹ Vsesoyuznoe soveshchanie, 1-53.

³⁰ Spisok delegatov Soveshchaniya Evangel'skikh Khristian i baptistov v Moskve s 26/X po 29/X 1944 g. [List of Delegates of the Conference of the Evangelical Christians and Baptists in Moscow from 26.10 to 29.10 1944]. Archive of AUCECB, file 11a, document 5 (electronic copy).

³¹ Vsesoyuznoe soveshchanie, 44-45.

³² Circular Letter of the AUCEC and B № 3498 from 01 September 1945. Archive of AUCECB, file 10k, document 7 (electronic copy).

controlling the main evangelical church bodies. The price for the opportunity to restart church work was loyalty towards an atheistic state.

Not all believers agreed with this position. Firstly, a significant number of Evangelical Christians and Baptists had been pacifists since the 1920s. Secondly, some believers considered loyalty towards an atheistic state as collaboration or even apostasy. These attitudes were so serious that they led to a split in the ECB brotherhood in 1961. Oppression produces not only loyalty but resistance.

At that time, the deported ethnic Germans were not affected by the changes in the religious policy of the state. The war with Germany was still going on. They struggled with bitter poverty and hunger far removed from any feelings of loyalty or war patriotism. Later, when many of them joined the Baptist Union, they had to put up with patriotism and loyalty or even the alleged collaborationism of the first Union leaders.

Phase One: Revival as Fellowship

Pietism – the Genetic Code of the Revival

Beginning in 1942, a spiritual revival slowly emerged between Germans in the USSR when small hidden prayer meetings started. It developed along Pietistic patterns of conversion and fellowship without denominational distinctions. A separate published essay of the author deals with this more deeply.³³

The way of Jakob Ginsman, born in 1920, is typical. His father died in 1924 and in the second year of collectivisation, 1930, his mother fled with the family ‘from the peasant’s persecution’ to the Caucasus. With the intervention of World War II, on 8 October 1941, his family was deported to the region of Kustanai in Kazakhstan. In 1942, Ginsman was mobilised to the Labour Army in Chelyabinsk from where he was released in 1947 and moved to the family of his brother who had died of starvation in the Labour Army and had left five children as orphans. Ginsman decided to bring them up himself. In 1953 he received permission to move to his brother, Johann, to the village of Osakarovka near the city of Karaganda. Johann was exiled here in 1947 after he was released from a 10-year sentence. Here Jakob Ginsman and his family met a small number of believers of different denominations, including Lutherans and Baptists who

³³ J. Dyck, ‘Revival as Church Restoration: Patterns of a Revival Among Ethnic Germans in Central Asia after World War II’ in *Mission in the Former Soviet Union*, eds. W.W. Sawatsky and P.F. Penner (Schwarzenfeld: Neufeld, 2005), pp. 74-93.

held hidden gatherings. Ginsman was finally converted through the perseverance of his wife. Until 1959, Baptists and Lutherans met together.³⁴

Thousands of Germans in the Soviet Union had similar experiences. The strict pressure and severe conditions did not eliminate faith. In 1942 the Mennonite preacher Johann Woelk organised hidden prayer meetings in Borovsk (Perm region);³⁵ a Ukrainian Ivan Gordeyuk gathered Mennonite women for prayer in Orsk (Ural region) in 1946;³⁶ Peter Dück started prayer meetings in 1954 in the village of Komsomolets, North Kazakhstan.³⁷

The list could easily be extended. Common to all were group gatherings and conversions. Both belonged to the core of Christian identity in its Pietistic form present in Russia at least since the 1820s.³⁸

The gatherings were attended by Baptists, Mennonites and Lutherans. During the war, the long forgotten interdenominational fellowship was re-established. The war shattered the denominational borders, and a considerable number of believers formed small hidden groups for prayer and sometimes, even singing. Denominational identity was less important when facing the need for survival. Gerd Stricker suggests that the brethren community pattern was the only way to survive, at least for the Lutheran Church in the USSR.³⁹

The Spread of the Revival

The war-time and post-war revival spread in several ways. Gerhard Wölk, a MB Church elder, himself a child of these times, sees women – often widows – as the main driving force behind the revival.⁴⁰ Indeed, as later congregational statistics show,⁴¹ a large number of the post-war revival participants were young people. Those statistics also show a generation gap between 1930-50 in the German churches in the USSR. The youngest

³⁴ Material of J. Ginsman, Höningen, 13/14 September 1999. Phonogram, J. Dyck's personal archive.

³⁵ H. Heidebrecht, *Fürchte dich nicht, du kleine Herde: Mennoniten in Russland und Sowjetunion* (Bielefeld: Christlicher Missions-Verlag, 1999), p. 86.

³⁶ 'Is shizni pomestnykh tserkveĭ. Orenburgskaya i Kuibyshevskaya oblasti' [From the Life of Local Churches. Orenburg and Kuibyshev regions] *Bratskiĭ Vestnik*, 6 (1987), pp. 75-6.

³⁷ Interview of P. Schulz with J. Dyck, 17 January 2003, Lage. Manuscript, J. Dyck's personal archive.

³⁸ W. Gutsche, *Westliche Quellen des russischen Stundismus* (Kassel: J.G. Oncken, 1956), p. 23.

³⁹ G. Stricker, 'Deutsches Kirchenwesen in der UdSSR nach 1941', in *Religionen in der UdSSR: unbekannte Vielfalt in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, eds. O. Basse and id. (Zollikon: G2W, 1989), pp. 161-75, 161, 165.

⁴⁰ G. Wölk, 'Frömmigkeit und gemeindliches Leben der Mennoniten in der Sowjetunion', in *200 Jahre Mennoniten in Russland: Aufsätze zu ihrer Geschichte und Kultur*, eds. G. and J. Hildebrandt (Boland-Weierhof: Verl. des Mennonitischen Geschichtsvereins, 2000), pp. 227-41, 233.

⁴¹ Member List of the Evangelical Christian-Baptists Church in Karaganda. Papers of Johann Koop, in possession of his son J. Koop, Lemgo, Germany.

participants of the revival were born around 1930. Until 1941/1942 they were under the influence of their parents, particularly their mothers. Therefore, the most important aspect of the revival – a Christian upbringing – was carried out long before the actual event.⁴² The next stage of the mission – to lead the children to conversion during dangerous times – was easier when the first part, primary socialisation in a Christian spirit, was successful.

Not all mothers had the courage and time to give their children a Christian education during the years of collectivisation and severe persecutions. Reinhold Mantai's mother was temporarily distanced from the Church and returned after her son had been converted.⁴³ Not all revival participants received a Christian education.

The revival spread in a specific stratum of society which was guarded by a language barrier. Most of the work was done in German, a language the participants were accustomed to. The Russian religious language was unknown to them and they could not even pray in Russian. Another barrier was fear. People who were afraid of losing their status in an atheistic society avoided religious gatherings. The young deported Germans had nothing to lose and joined the gatherings, as Nikolaj Reimer, a preacher in northern Kazakhstan from the 1950s to 1970s, remembers.⁴⁴

Crystallisation Centres of the Revival

The revival of Germans during and after World War II varied in intensity at different times. Just after the war, the opportunities were good. After 1948, and especially between 1950 and 1954, the pressure of sentences of up to twenty-five years in prison produced a drawback.⁴⁵

Not all locations of the revival were of equal importance. Some became, in time, centres of church life for Germans in the USSR. The deciding factors were a high concentration of deported Germans and a kind of crystallisation point. Locations with large numbers of Germans were spread around the whole country – from Noril'sk⁴⁶ in the extreme north of Siberia to Chelyabinsk⁴⁷ in the Ural region, from Kostroma⁴⁸ in northern

⁴² Dyck, 'Revival as Church Restoration: Patterns of a Revival Among Ethnic Germans in Central Asia after World War II', p. 78.

⁴³ Material of R. Mantai, 14 September 1999, Höningen. Phonogram, J. Dyck's personal archive.

⁴⁴ N. Reimer, *Nur aus Gnaden. Erinnerungen* (Chişinău [1996]), p. 98.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93

⁴⁷ 'Aus der Geschichte der Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinde Tscheljabinsk' *Aquila*, 4 (1998), pp. 22-4.

⁴⁸ Documents of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Kostroma Region in the exposition of the Museum der Deutschen in/aus Russland, Detmold, November 2005.

Russia to Karaganda⁴⁹ in Kazakhstan. In all these places revival took place, but most of them did not appear later in the list of German congregations in the USSR⁵⁰ – a crystallisation point was missing.

The most important crystallisation point for ethnic Germans in the post-war revival was Karaganda. In 1930, the Soviet government declared Karaganda as a rich coalmining area and in 1931 it became a place of exile when the mass expulsion to Karaganda began resulting in an immense loss in human lives. In the same year, two faith communities began there. The first was a Mennonite Church with exiles from the Am Trakt Mennonite colony, but ceased in 1934 when their leaders were imprisoned. The second one, consisting of Russian Baptists and Evangelical Christians, had regular meetings from 1934 and baptisms from 1935, and managed to get legal status in 1946.⁵¹ At that time, it had a total membership of 258 people⁵² and gathered in a house built of adobe bricks covered in ashes. In 1948, it was one of twenty-five legalised ECB Churches in Kazakhstan.⁵³

At the time of the legalisation, there was a considerable number of exiled Germans in membership: the list of members for 1946 includes about fifty German names.⁵⁴ One of them was Peter Bergmann. He received some theological education in the Orenburg MB Bible School between 1923-26⁵⁵ and escaped imprisonment in the 1930s by taking flight to the Ukraine. After the deportation to Kazakhstan in 1941, he was ordered to enter the Labour Army at Karaganda, where he arrived in 1944. He joined the ECB Church and started to preach there.

Somewhat earlier, in 1942, a large number of young Germans were mobilised to the Labour Army at Karaganda. Here, behind barbed wire, some were converted. Fifteen-year-old David Koop was converted through

⁴⁹ *Ya s vami vo vse dni do skonchaniya veka. Shisn' veruyushchikh v Karagande (1931-1946 gg.)* [I am with you always, to the end of the age. The life of believers in Karaganda (1931-1946)], ed. V. Fast (Karaganda, 2001), pp. 113-160.

⁵⁰ Nemetsko-mennonitskoe bratstvo. Obshchiný, v kotorýkh imeyutsya predstaviteli bratstva. [German-Mennonite Brotherhood. Churches With Representatives of the Brotherhood] Manuscript. Papers of Emil Baumbach, in possession of his son Alexander Baumbach, Fulda, Germany.

⁵¹ M.P. Fadin, *Doklad po istorii tserkvi*. [Report on Church History] Manuscript. Archive of the Karaganda ECB Church.

⁵² List of church members for 1946. Archive of the Karaganda Evangelical Christians-Baptist Church (electronic copy).

⁵³ *Svedeniya o kolichestve obshchin evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov i chlenov obshchin*. [Information On Number of Congregations of Evangelical Christians-Baptists And Congregation Membership] Letter of the AUCECB to the Council for Affairs of Religious Cults № 2126 from 30/X 1958. Archive of AUCECB, file 2, document 8 (electronic copy), p. 2.

⁵⁴ List of church members for 1946.

⁵⁵ *Memoirs of P. Bergmann*. Phonogram, collection of M. Bergmann, Bielefeld, Germany; K. Fast, *Orenburg, die letzte mennonitische Ansiedlung in Osteuropa* (Winnipeg: Das bunte Fenster, 1995), pp. 64-6.

his seventeen-year-old brother Johann Koop.⁵⁶ With the end of the war in 1945, the barbed wire around the barracks was removed, and some young Germans found their way to the Russian ECB Church. Peter Bergmann became their spiritual father. In this way, a relatively large number of young Germans became involved in a revival in a church environment.

The revival among young Germans in Karaganda peaked in 1949, as Reinhold Mantai remembers.⁵⁷ He was born in 1929, lost his father in the early 1930s and, in 1941 was deported with his mother to Central Kazakhstan. He had only two years of primary school education. As a fourteen-year-old, he was ordered to work in the Karaganda coalmines. In 1948, a Lutheran pastor began regular gatherings in private houses in Mantai's neighbourhood. The people were hungry, and the living rooms were full. Ignorant of religion up to this point, Mantai received baptism and confirmation from this pastor. In 1949 he discovered a small Russian Baptist church in his city where he experienced a conversion and received believer's baptism. Mantai, together with Valentin Kemling and Johannes Schwarz started their own evening gatherings. Several times during the week, the houses were full. Conversions occurred often – up to five in one evening. Similar gatherings occurred simultaneously in several parts of the city. The converted people joined either the Baptist or the Lutheran Church. In this way, Karaganda became the largest crystallisation point of the revival.⁵⁸

The number of Germans in Karaganda continually increased due to repatriates who, in 1943, were taken by the Nazis from the Ukraine to Germany and sent to Central Asia by the Communists in 1945. These people experienced a revival in occupied Ukraine and practiced their faith in German. After the war, family reunions were made possible, and people again moved to Karaganda. At least here there was no hunger, and a loaf of bread in Karaganda only cost 40 roubles – five times cheaper than in Chelyabinsk, another big industrial centre.⁵⁹ In this way, Karaganda became a large German centre.

On 13 December 1955, the Soviet government abolished the deportation status of the Germans in the USSR, whereupon more than one million people had the possibility to freely choose their place of residence.

⁵⁶ Information of D. Koop to J. Dyck, 1999.

⁵⁷ Material of R. Mantai, Höningen.

⁵⁸ Nemetsko-mennonitskoe bratstvo.

⁵⁹ Material of J. Braun, Höningen, 14 September 1999. Phonogram, J. Dyck's personal archive.

Phase Two: Revival as Church

New Survival Strategy: Disobedience

In 1956, a thaw in the country set in. Prisoners of faith were released, and the number of faith fellowships rapidly grew. German believers began to trust the Soviet postal system and established letter contacts, building their own infrastructure.⁶⁰

Meanwhile, the ECB Church in Karaganda having grown to almost 1000 members⁶¹ with 65% of them Germans,⁶² erected a spacious building in the outskirts of the city. At the same time, a group of German members was dissatisfied with the situation in the church, which was led by a voluntary appointed council of twenty people as demanded by the religious legislation, had no special members' meetings, and the number of preachers was strictly limited. In December 1956, twenty-one Mennonites decided to leave the church and organise a German Mennonite Brethren Church.⁶³

From the very beginning, the new Church used Mennonite patterns of church life. In September 1957 David Klassen was elected elder, and Gerhard Harder and Abram Friesen assistant elders. In 1958, they were ordained by a Mennonite preacher. The church had regular members' meetings, Bible and prayer hours, and home visitations in accordance with Mennonite practice.⁶⁴ A definite pattern became the coordinated system and reference point for church life.

During the next two years, the MB Church grew to 900 members. Half of them had previously been baptised and were accustomed to church life. Another 454 people were baptised in the new church.⁶⁵ In this way, in a very short time, a new church was organised and became known in the country.

In 1958, the political climate in the country changed, and a new wave of persecution became visible. The Church was refused legalisation. Confiscation of prayer houses and disruption to services in living rooms followed, forcing people to leave the city or be imprisoned. Mennonites

⁶⁰ Reimer, *Nur aus Gnaden. Erinnerungen*, pp. 111-114.

⁶¹ Archive of the Karaganda ECB Church.

⁶² D. Klassen, Autobiography, 24 June 1977. Manuscript, J. Dyck's personal archive.

⁶³ Material of J. Friesen Sen., Höningen, 14 September 1999. Phonogram, J. Dyck's personal archive.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ [V. Fast,] 'Aus der Geschichte der Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinde Karaganda', *Aquila*, 4 (1997), pp. 9-15, 12.

generally were not legalised 'in view of [their] reactionary orientation'.⁶⁶ Baptists, Pentecostals, Old Believers, Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses were also considered as extremely reactionary and antisocial.⁶⁷ In December 1962, Klassen was sentenced to three years in a maximum-security institution.⁶⁸ The church was left without its leader, but still gathered in homes in three different parts of the city.

During the absence of Klassen, new people gained influence, and a different orientation of the church took place⁶⁹ resulting in a deep aversion towards Baptists.⁷⁰ In 1965, Klassen was released. Returning home, he resigned from his position as elder. A number of ordained preachers, including the former assistant elders Harder and Friesen, left the MB Church and joined the Baptists.

In 1964, the more tolerant Brezhnev era began. In 1967, the MB Church in Karaganda obtained legal status as an autonomous church and in 1968 erected a church building.⁷¹ It was not integrated into the system of the AUCECB nor the underground Council of Churches of the Evangelical Christian-Baptists (CCECB).

In April 1959, a new team took on the leadership of the ECB Church in Karaganda. In August 1959, the Germans were allowed to conduct separate services. When, in 1965, Harder and Friesen returned from the MB Church, Harder was appointed leader of the German services, and Friesen managed to introduce the most significant Mennonite Church practices in the entire ECB Church. He designed an addendum⁷² to the official Statutes released from the AUCECB and obliged the church workers to sign it. In this way, the Germans felt at home in the ECB Church.

⁶⁶ Spravka o sektantakh-mennonitakh Karagandninskogo oblispolkoma ash/3 ot 12.11.1962 [Certificate of the Karaganda Oblast Executive Committee about Mennonite Sectarians], State Archive of the Karaganda Oblast, fund 1364, file 60, pp. 22-23 (electronic copy).

⁶⁷ Spravka o sektantskikh organizatsiyakh, deyatel'nost' kotorykh nosit kraĭne reaksionnŭi i antiobshchestvennŭi kharakter (baptism, pyatidesyatniki, staroobryadtsy, mennonity, sekta adventisty sed'mogo dnya, iegovisty), 2.3.1962 [Certificate on Sectarian Organizations, Activity of which is Extremely Reactionary and Antisocial (Baptists, Pentecostals, Old Order Believers, Mennonites, Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses)], *ibid.*, file 59, pp. 47-50.

⁶⁸ D. Klassen, Autobiography.

⁶⁹ [V. Fast,] 'Aus der Geschichte der Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinde Karaganda (Fortsetzung)' *Aquila*, 4 (1998), pp. 9-17, 12.

⁷⁰ H. Wölk, G. Wölk, *Die Mennoniten Brüdergemeinde in Rußland 1925-1980* (Winnipeg: Christian Press, 1981), pp. 94-6.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁷² Addendum to the Statute of AUCECB. Papers of Emil Baumbach in possession of his son A. Baumbach, Fulda, Germany.

From Fellowship to Church

The development in Karaganda mirrors the situation in the whole of Central Asia. With the thaw between 1955 and 1958, the hidden fellowship meetings began to crystallise into ECB and MB churches. Not everywhere were the strong and proven principles taken as ultimate guidance. Often the restoration of MB and ECB church patterns, which were similar, were marked by baptisms, exemplified by the first baptisms in villages around the city of Shchuchinsk in northern Kazakhstan, which took place in 1956: Andreas Pankratz baptised eight people in Kotýrkol, Jakob Konrad baptised in Kovalevka, Franz Klassen in Obalý, Jakob Fedrau baptised twelve people in Raï-Gorodok, Abram Koop baptised between twenty-three and twenty-eight people in Zlatopol'ye, Gerhard Unruh baptised one person in Urumkaï.⁷³ Most of those baptised had been converted after 1946. The picture was similar in other regions.

With the transition to regular church life, the enthusiastic character of the fellowship underwent significant changes, though the fellowship itself was quite stable. Previously the gatherings would cease their activities if they were under threat. Herta Vogel remembers a story of Justine Neufeld who, in 1955, organised a choir that sung in gatherings in Shchuchinsk that included Mennonites, Baptists and Lutherans. On Christmas Eve 1956, Herta was summoned to a meeting with a KGB officer who demanded collaboration. Eventually, Herta distanced herself from the gatherings, the choir ceased, and a large number of its members stopped participating in the gatherings.⁷⁴ The structure of the fellowship was unable to produce a church body that could hold itself together during persecution.

Usually the link between fellowship and church was marked by baptism. Here the common gatherings with Lutherans usually ended, as it happened, for example, in Osakarovka in 1959.⁷⁵ Those traditional Mennonites who did not acknowledge repentance as a condition of baptism, also distanced themselves. The regular celebration of the Lord's Supper consolidated the group, and the traditional church order that included principles of church discipline and priesthood of all believers⁷⁶ formed a homogeneous faith community.

Some baptised people moved to places where churches existed. Those who remained formed small village churches that mostly survived

⁷³ *Stschutschinsk. Geschichte einer Gemeinde* ([Fulda, 1999]), pp. 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 16.

⁷⁴ H. Vogel (ed.), *Lockvögel im Netz. KGB im Kontext* (Münster: Monsenstein und Vannerdat, 2003), pp. 47-56.

⁷⁵ Material of J. Ginsman, Höningen.

⁷⁶ H. Wölk, *Die Mennoniten Brüdergemeinde in Rußland 1925-1980*, p. 93.

the next phase of persecutions. In this way, a new ECB and MB Church geography in Kazakhstan developed with several large churches in cities and a large number of smaller churches in villages.

A small number of brethren who survived the purges of Stalin in the 1920s played an outstanding role in establishing new churches. Peter Bergmann has already been mentioned. Johannes Fast of Alt-Samara was exiled in 1931 to the Far East. In 1955, he moved to Temir-Tau near Karaganda and began his itinerant preaching ministry at 69 years of age. His last big preaching tour took place in 1978 when he was 92 years old.⁷⁷ The brethren visited churches, evangelised, preached, baptised, ordained ministers, and ordered church matters. In this way, a certain continuity with the 1920s was established.

Stratification

The first decade of church restoration in the ECB and MB tradition took place in the turbulent times after the Stalin thaw, Khrushchev's repressions, and Brezhnev's stabilisation. During this time, the ECB brotherhood split into two conflicting unions of the AUCECB and CCECB.⁷⁸ The latter represented the so-called Reform Baptists who rejected legalisation by the Communist state. On a smaller scale, a differentiation and stratification also took place in the German Churches.

Atheistic state oppression forced the larger churches to divide into smaller groups. That made it easier to find a place to gather. Also, the number of leaders in the church and their influence on the group grew, both at the expense of the unity of the whole church and the more egalitarian leadership patterns. For example: the ECB Church in Balkhash was forced to split into four groups. In one group, the leader received special revelations about God in the Old Testament; the second group tended towards the CCECB that had *in absentia* excommunicated leaders of a parallel group.⁷⁹ For several years the MB Church in Karaganda was forced to split into three groups, each with their own affinities. Decades later in the united MB Church there were active supporters of the underground Baptists, the officially recognised Baptists, and the majority with a strict Mennonite identity disregarding both.⁸⁰ In the battle for the existence of the church, the sense of its unity was lost.

⁷⁷ J. Fast, Autobiography. Handwritten copy, J. Dyck's personal archive.

⁷⁸ *Istoriya evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov v SSSR*, p. 238.

⁷⁹ Material of R. Leneschmidt, Höningen, 13 September 1999. Phonogram, J. Dyck's personal archive.

⁸⁰ H. Wölk, *Die Mennoniten Brüdergemeinde in Rußland 1925-1980*, pp. 94-100.

In general, at the time of the first regular congress of the AUCECB in 1966⁸¹ the position was clear. Churches that were ready to legalise chose the way of the AUCECB, knowing that even then a confrontation with the state was unavoidable, as Karl Götz remembers.⁸² Those who rejected any compromise with the godless government were on the side of the CCECB. The MB Church in Karaganda opened up a third way, that of autonomous legalisation. In the subsequent years, several MB Church in Russia and one in Kyrgyzstan followed this way. For Mennonite Churches, who practised baptism by pouring, it became the usual way of legalisation.

The time of fellowship, revival, and church restoration showed that the Mennonites and German-speaking Baptists were not an isolated faith community guarded by language and special legislation as in tsarist times. They all became part of one big group of evangelicals in the Soviet Union, being united by common church structures and practices.⁸³ Divisions were caused by non-theological issues.

This period produced a shift in identity with certain Mennonites. The most tolerant regarding confessional identity was the AUCECB which included different denominations. Mennonites could choose between several models of cooperation at the church level. Most preferred was the model of a church within a church when the Germans maintained their own leadership and only shared in the use of the building with the Russian part of the church, as in Frunze, Kyrgyzstan. The second model provided separate German services under a common church leadership. While the leadership of the AUCECB stressed the presence of MB's in the union, its local representatives tried to present all members of Baptist churches, including Mennonites, as Baptists. On the other hand, the CCECB, with its strict leadership, did not tolerate deviations even in the name of its member churches, using the common name of Evangelical Christian-Baptists.⁸⁴ With the exception of the MB Churches, the preserving of Mennonite identity in a Baptist environment took place within the family.

⁸¹ *Istoriya evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov v SSSR*, pp. 246-248.

⁸² K. Götz, *Auf den Spuren meines Lebens* (Gummersbach, 1997), pp. 107-112.

⁸³ Ya. Ya. Fast, 'Istoricheskiĭ put' razvitiya vzaimootnosheniĭ bratskikh mennonitov s evangel'sko-baptistskim bratstvom' [The Historical Way of Development of Mutual Relations of the Mennonite Brethren with the Evangelical-Baptist Brotherhood], *Bratskiĭ vestnik*, 1(1985), pp. 53-9.

⁸⁴ Examples in: R.G. Dik, *Ogon' palyashchiĭ shisn' khranit. Istoriya tserkvi poselka Rudnik-Dshezkazgan* [Scorching Fire Keeps Life. History of the Church in the Settlement of Rudnik-Dshezkazgan] (Gummersbach, 2005), pp. 102, 108.

Conclusion

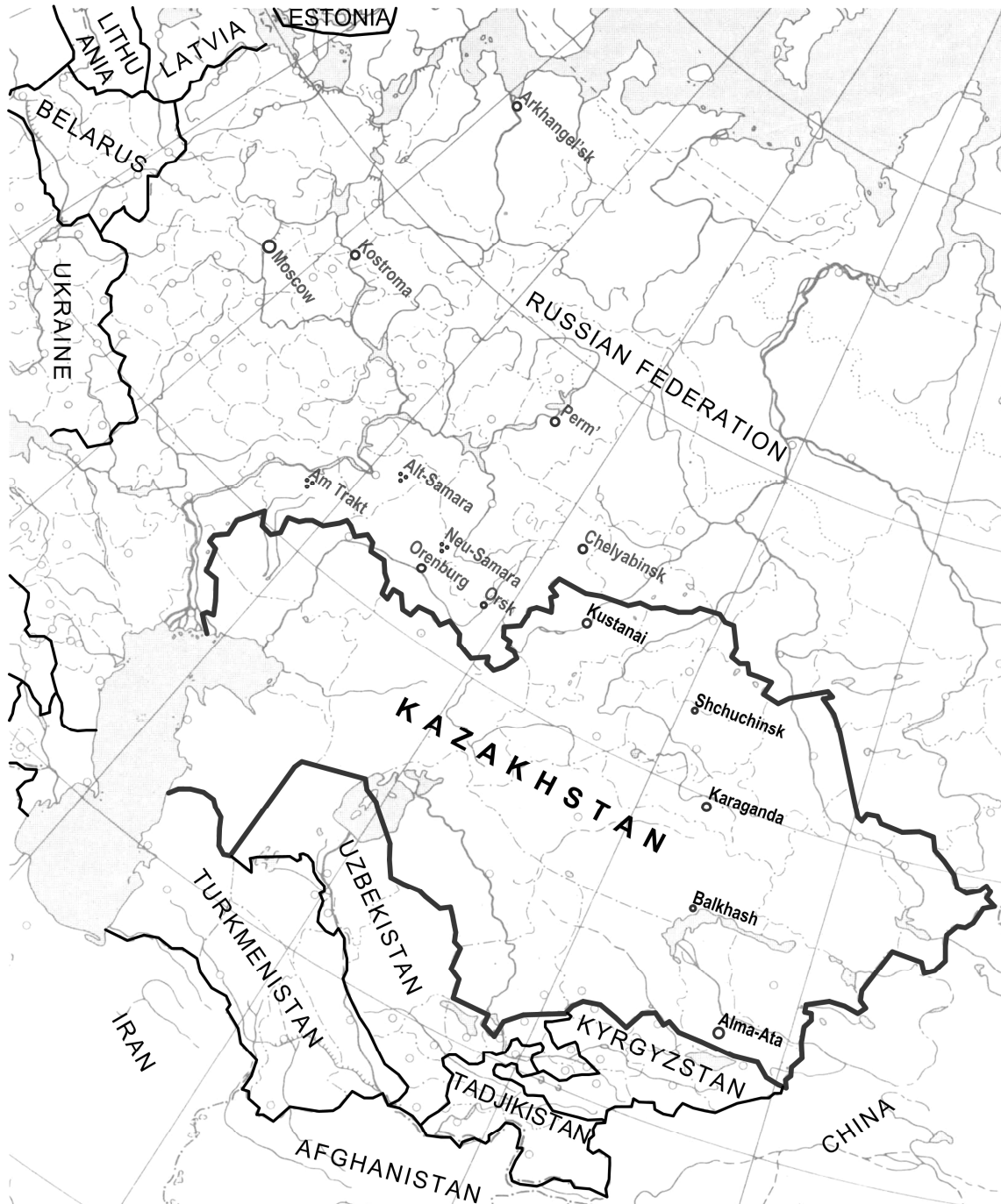
Due to Stalin's purges, the Churches of the Mennonites and German Baptists in the USSR were destroyed. During World War II, most of the German-speaking believers were deported to Siberia, Kazakhstan and Middle Asia. Not until ten years after the end of the war were they allowed to resettle.

In spite of harsh oppression, the faith was not completely wiped out. The first manifestations of faith made no denominational distinctions between Baptists, Lutherans and Mennonites. This phase resembled the times of the Pietistic revival one hundred years earlier.

Due to political changes, the Germans received their freedom and, at the same time, the children of the revival began to be baptised. In the process of organising the churches, this led to crystallisation points of the revival, some being newly organised, others had previously been organised by Russian believers. A few ministers were able to bridge gaps between the 1920s and 1950s providing a continuity of church patterns.

The faith of the fellowship, with strong Pietistic patterns, transformed into stable congregational structures where church patterns became the main reference point of church life.

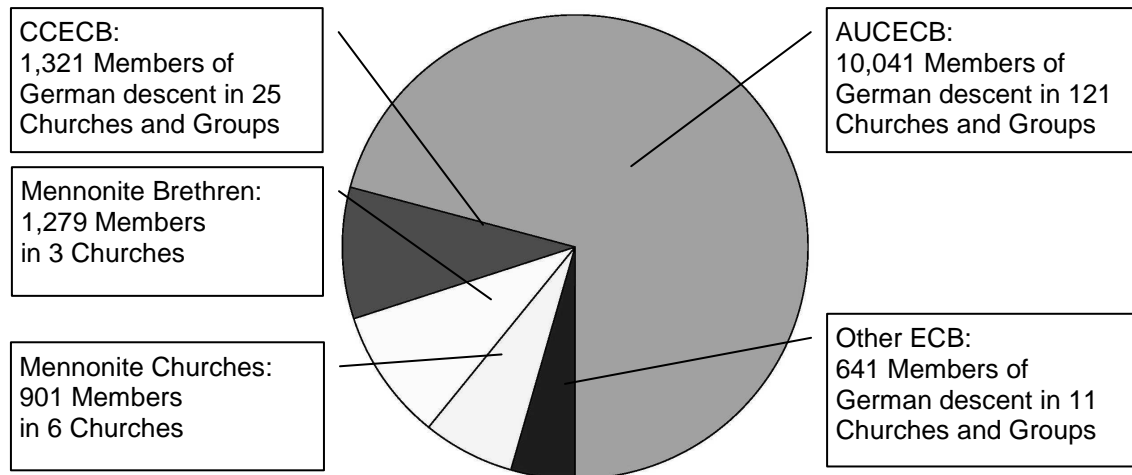
Appendix 1: Map of Kazakhstan



Map of Kazakhstan and the western part of USSR⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Base of the map: *Konturnýe kartý po geografii, 8 klass* [Skeleton Maps for Geography, 8th grade] (Moscow, 1995), p. 1.

Appendix 2: Statistics of German-speaking Members in ECB and Mennonite Churches in Kazakhstan for 1986



German-speaking Members in ECB and Mennonite Churches in Kazakhstan as of 1986 according to AUCECB statistics.⁸⁶

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⁸⁶ Base of the data: Nemetsko-mennonitskoe bratstvo.

Book Review

Parush R. Parushev, Ovidiu Creangă and Brian Brock, eds.,
Ethical Thinking at the Crossroads of European Reasoning
 Prague: IBTS, 2007, 222pp.

The flow of fine volumes produced by IBTS continues. This is the result of a meeting of the International Postgraduate Theological Symposium held at IBTS, 15-16 February 2007. These symposia started when some (mostly Western) theology students expressed an interest in getting to know their peers from Eastern Europe. The first symposium, in 2004, in Osijek (Croatia) at the Evangelical Theological Seminary, was followed by a meeting at the Emmanuel Retreat Centre in Romania in 2005. The third, at IBTS, again drew together younger and more experienced scholars intent on sharing theological knowledge, research skills, and life experiences.

Zoltan Biro (Romania), whose paper is on decision-making in a pastoral context, is an MTh student in Oxford. Liam Waldron (Ireland) is working on a doctoral proposal on a dialogue between theology and public policy relating to disability. Other contributors have embarked on PhD studies and their papers show work in progress. These include Lina Andronovienė (Lithuania), an IBTS PhD student (the IBTS PhDs are accredited by the University of Wales) who looks at the theology of friendship; Andy Odle (USA), undertaking a PhD at King's College, University of Aberdeen, on the church in the world, especially focusing on the homeless; and Peter Zvagulis (Latvia), a PhD student at IBTS exploring perceptual aspects of communal violence and reconciliation.

The paper by Scot Becker (USA) arises from his PhD studies at Aberdeen University on the relationship of Luke to the Old Testament. Doug Heidebrecht (Canada) is a PhD student at IBTS, and his paper arises from his work on James McClendon's practice of communal discernment and conflicting convictions among Mennonite Brethren. Gregory Nichols (USA), an IBTS PhD student, has contributed from his research on Ivan Kargel and the shaping of Baptist identity in the Russian-speaking world. In addition, there are papers from Ovidiu Creangă (Romania), working on his doctoral dissertation at King's College London, on 'Israel's Identity and the Commemoration of the Past in Joshua's Conquest Narrative'; Mark Moore (USA), similarly completing PhD work in biblical studies with IBTS; Brian Brock (USA), Lecturer in Moral and Practical Theology of Aberdeen University; Corneliu Constantineanu (Romania/ Croatia), Dean of Graduate Studies and Associate Professor of New Testament at ETS in Osijek; Parush R Parushev (Bulgaria), Pro-Rector and Senior Research Lecturer in Applied Theology at IBTS; and Matthew Thomas (USA), who is exploring Israel's growing sense of its identity as expressed in the biblical text.

This is a rich feast. The papers in this volume make a significant contribution to interdisciplinary theological cross-fertilization.

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